The Assistant Principal Position as Preparation for the Principalship

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THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL POSITION AS
PREPARATION FOR THE PRINCIPALSHIP

by
Abigail May

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of
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To the Clendenin Family whose scholarship funds have allowed me the opportunity to pursue this doctoral degree. May I always be able to Keep the Lamp Burning here at Kennesaw State University and beyond. I thank you for this opportunity.
DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this work to my family. To my parents, Wayne and Lisa Pfeiffer, for always believing in me and encouraging me to work hard. Thank you for showing me the importance of commitment and education. To my sister, Kimberly, whose faith in me is never ending and who will always be my best friend. My success has been a direct result of the support each of you have given me throughout my life.

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To my beautiful children…. may this work signify the importance of education and perseverance. To my Riley Jane, who loves learning as much as I do and who enjoyed coming to classes with me many nights throughout my time at KSU. To my little boys, Connor and Caden, who provided an interesting challenge during this process but who add love and light to our lives. I hope you all are proud of your momma!

Next, this work is dedicated to my best friends who have showered me with praise and recognition so often during these few years. I am only as strong as I am because of the support system they have created. Their belief in me made it all possible.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my colleagues whose professional insight and perspectives made research like this possible. Thank you for enriching my professional life and continuing to teach me every day.
The purposes of this study were to determine if the position of the assistant principal is an effective pathway to the principalship and to examine the links between actual and ideal responsibilities of the assistant principal and principal positions, and the accountability measures of preparation for the principalship. This research study was conducted using a qualitative case study with a phenomenological touch. The particular phenomena studied in this research is the assistant principal role as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast. By nature, case studies involve a small target population.

The study analyzed the leadership preparation, responsibilities, and evaluation of the assistant principal. This study includes details on the position of the principal as it is the next typical career step for assistant principals. It should be noted that not all assistant principals aspire to become principals, but this study focused on those that do. The participants consisted of seven secondary assistant principals and six secondary principals, as well as a mini case of an elementary principal and one on the researcher.

The findings were presented categorized by the four themes that emerged during the interviews - evaluation, instructional leadership, preparation, and role/responsibilities. Each of the findings center back to the importance of the principal in preparing their assistant principals for the principalship. The respondents in this study demanded that principals assume this

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responsibility and that those stakeholders that support principals provide them with coaching and the expectations to do so. Colleges and universities, as well, should be purposeful in their preparation of principals to include a portion on coaching and preparing others. Finally, the state should provide guidance and suggestions about how to use the LKES evaluation as a coaching tool in preparing for the principalship.

This research provides insight with regard to the transition from assistant principal to principal and how to define, evaluate, and support both roles. The findings impact how colleges and universities should structure their preparation programs for school leaders. Additionally, individual school leaders will find this research beneficial due to the pragmatic findings in the study. Both assistant principals and principals can find critical information about how roles and responsibilities along with evaluations impact the transition. Districts can use this research to address their coaching of principals for leadership preparation and support for current assistant principals who aim to become principals.

*Keywords:* Leader Keys Effectiveness System, evaluation, instructional leadership, preparation, and role/responsibilities.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Gronn and Rawlings-Sanai (2003) noted that attracting an adequate number of high-quality candidates to the position of principal is a concern for many school systems. The assistant principal has long been known as the precursor position to the principalship (Denmark & Davis, 2000). Educational research is beginning to emerge surrounding the notion that assistant principals are often hesitant to become principals (Glanz, 2004; Weller & Weller, 2002). Marshall and Hooley (2006) concluded in their research that sitting assistant principals who aspire to be principals are more satisfied with their current work responsibilities than those assistant principals who are hesitant to move into a principalship position. The discrepancy in job satisfaction and aspiration lies in the perception between the actual and ideal work responsibilities of the assistant principal (Glanz 2004; Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004). Cranston, et al. (2004) concluded that there was a significant difference between what the assistant principals believed they should be spending their time on and the actual tasks they were completing within their work day. Participants noted that they spent most of their time involved in student related concerns versus “strategic leadership” (p.239) - - the strategic leadership necessary for the success of their school. When assistant principals were able to focus on their ideal tasks, they were much more satisfied than those who had to spend their time doing those less strategic tasks (Cranston, et al. 2004). Research by Sutter (1996) highlighted this relationship by surveying assistant principals. The findings showed that if the assistant principal favored his or her position he or she was more motivated to continue toward the principalship.
This chapter includes the purpose of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, the conceptual framework of the study, and review of terms.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of this study are to determine if the position of the assistant principal is an effective pathway to the principalship and to examine both the position of the principal and assistant principal, the links between their actual and ideal responsibilities, and the accountability measures of each as related to preparation for the principalship. The study analyzed the leadership preparation, responsibilities, and evaluation of the assistant principal. Glanz (2004) described the assistant principal as underutilized and tagged that role as the “forgotten man” (p.283). Additionally, the professional literature included little examination of the position of the assistant principal (Glanz, 2004). This study included details on the position of the principal as it is the next typical career step for assistant principals. It should be noted that not all assistant principals aspire to become principals, but this study focused on those that do. Providing specifics on the responsibilities of a principal illustrates the position of the assistant principal in preparation for the principalship. The results of this study aimed to improve the position of the assistant principal. The research has implications for school districts and state educational systems in terms of preparing assistant principals for the principalship. This research could provide insight with regard to the transition from assistant principal to principal and how to define, evaluate, and support both roles. Educational leadership programs can also benefit from this research. The findings could impact how colleges and universities structure their preparation programs for school leaders. Additionally, this research is beneficial to individual school leaders. Both assistant principals and principals can find critical information about how roles and responsibilities along with evaluations impact the transition.
Statement of the Problem

The context for this study is based on the assertion that the assistant principal position is a career preparation for the principalship. Accountability for school leadership becomes more defined as changes in expectations of the position of the principal move toward a greater emphasis on instructional leadership. Simultaneously, the responsibilities of a principal have expanded to include professional and instructional proficiencies and more accountability for school success (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Therefore, this study analyzed the current positions and responsibilities of school leaders, specifically focusing on the assistant principal. In addition, this study evaluated the assistant principal position as an appropriate and necessary precursor to becoming a principal.

Webb and Villiamy (1995) described the responsibilities of the assistant principal as curriculum leadership, class teaching, professional development for staff, and principal assigned managerial tasks. The most recent research on positions and responsibilities listed seven key tasks for assistant principals – student issues, strategic leadership, instructional leadership, managerial tasks, parent/community concerns, and school operational needs (Cranston et al., 2004). Mertz (2000) concluded that assistant principals should be involved in not only student discipline but also in external affairs, school improvement projects, and new teacher staff development.

The current leader evaluation system in Georgia, the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (2014) or LKES, holds both the assistant principal and principal accountable under the same evaluation instrument. With the defined discrepancies in the position of both leadership positions, this evaluation system should be examined further. Certain tasks given to the assistant principal, however, do not fall into the standards of the LKES. With increased accountability and
ties to their overall evaluation, assistant principals must be given an opportunity to participate in instructional leadership and focus their daily efforts on the tasks that mirror the position of the principal. In the current situation, measuring the instructional focus of an assistant principal by way of an accountability based evaluation seems inadequate and unsupportive. Coaching teachers, providing key professional development, participating in lesson plan development, and strongly leading instructional practice is crucial for the development of the assistant principal. By providing assistant principals with an opportunity to be directly involved in instructional leadership, the school district along with the principal may assist in developing assistant principal’s as instructional leaders and is ensures that the position of the assistant principal is preparation for the principalship.

**Research Questions**

This phenomenological case study addressed one main research question;

1) Does the assistant principal position prepare candidates for the principalship?

Additional questions related to the practical goals driving the case study and incorporate the phenomenological dimension of the study:

a) To what extent do assistant principals view their position as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?

b) To what extent do principals view the position of the assistant principal as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?

This methodology was chosen because the phenomenological approach allows the researcher to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of the assistant principal role as preparation for the principalship. Defining it further within a case study, helped a novice researcher define steps and conduct the research within a smaller population size.
Significance of the Study

Retaining an effective principal is key to the success of a school. Nearly one-half of all principals remain in the position for only three years (Superville, 2014), the lack of support, development, clear definition of the position, and preparation have been to blame (Superville, 2014). The costs of replacing and onboarding a new principal is expensive and over the last ten years systems have concentrated their efforts on retaining effective principals (Superville, 2014). The assistant principal position has long been the necessary pipeline path to the principalship, yet research is lacking on the assistant principal position (Armstrong, 2004). The significance of this study is identify and understand the pathway of school leadership, with a close lens on the role of the assistant principal, within a school building. It described the current reality and examine similarities and differences between the positions of the assistant principal and the principal. The results of this research are expected to influence practice and procedures surrounding the progression of school-based leadership. Analyzing and evaluating job descriptions, position expectations, leadership experiences, and leadership evaluation standards provided a framework for understanding current practices and influence future policy and practices. Implications of this research may influence system preparation efforts for principal sustainability and retention, as well as for the development of a larger pool of candidates to select when vacancies arise. The conclusions provided evidence of the particular sets of knowledge and skills within the assistant principal and principal experiences in current positions, professional development, and support for assistant principals.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the adult learning theory. By using this concept, the study addressed the knowledge and skill set of the assistant principal position
and its impact on preparation for the principalship. To make the framework appropriate for this study, the connection must be made between the two positions – principal and assistant principal. In nearly all cases, the assistant principal position is a requirement for the principalship. This creates an opportunity for the assistant principal position to be considered a training ground and learning experience for the principalship.

Taking a closer look at the adult learning theory provided further support for the conceptual framework. Adult learning, developed by Knowles – the father of andragogy, contains key components and elements of adult learning. Knowles defined andragogy as the “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 272). The two key elements in andragogy are that the learner changes within the process and that the process itself can be used to drive change within an organization (Knowles, 1980). These two elements are important in this study as the research aimed to identify the knowledge and skill sets of the assistant principal during preparation for the principalship.


2. Adult Learning Experience – with maturity, adults’ learning comes from an accumulation of experiences.
3. Readiness to Learn – with maturity, adults’ tasks and social roles drive their readiness to learn.
4. Orientation to Learning – with maturity, adults’ learning becomes more problem-centered versus subject-centered while focused on immediate application of learning versus delayed application.


These assumptions provide a structure for the research within this study. Using these assumptions throughout the interpretation of results were critical to connecting what an assistant principal learns in his/her position that affects his/her preparation for the principalship. A focus on self-concept and the adult learning experience is emphasized in the theoretical framework and will be highlighted in the relevant research.

In addition to these assumptions, Knowles (1984) concluded that four principles drive adult learning. These principles are also influential to the conceptual framework:

1. Adults need to not only understand the why behind their learning but also be a part of the design and evaluation of their learning.

2. The basis for learning within adults comes from experiences, even the mistakes made.

3. Relevant learning that is immediately applicable is most important to adults.

4. Adults learn best in a problem-centered environment rather than in a content-learning environment (p.12).

This study investigated the roles and responsibilities of current assistant principals and principals. The research illustrated the experiences within each position and the relevance of the tasks. The assistant principal position is designed, as highlighted in the research, to be a preparatory role for the principalship (Denmark & Davis, 2000). Considering these principles of
andragogy, the research addressed if the relevance and problem-centered learning approach is applicable from one position to another.

**Review of Relevant Terms**

The research uses the following terms:

- **Assistant Principal** – a person whose job is to help another person to do work, specifically the principal as defined next.
- **Principal** – a person who has controlling authority or is in a leading position as the chief executive officer of an educational institution.
- **Position/Role** – a function or part performed especially in a particular operation or process.
- **Responsibility/Duty** – something for which one is responsible involving important duties, decisions, etc., that one are trusted to do.
- **System or District** – a defined geographical space containing an organized grouping of schools.
- **Evaluation system** – all the components by which principals are evaluated, including the underlying standards upon which judgments are made, the instruments used to assess performance, and other related tools and processes (New Leaders for New Schools, 2010).
- **Leader Keys Evaluation System** – a common evaluation system that will allow the state to ensure consistency and comparability across districts, based on a common definition of leader effectiveness in Georgia (GaDOE, 2013).

It is important to note, as it relates to key terms within this study, that some words are used interchangeably and for purposes and ease of the reader and ease of the reader when more
clarification is needed. In all cases throughout this study, the words “role” and “position” represent the same term. These words are used frequently and similarly in the literature. As it pertains to this study, these words represent the job of the assistant principal. Likewise, the words “responsibilities,” “experiences,” and “duties” are used equally. These terms are used throughout the literature and this study to represent the tasks involved in the job of the assistant principal and principal. Finally, the words “district” and “system” are used similarly in the literature to represent a local organization of schools. “District” was used throughout the study to describe the latter and the word “system” was used in particular in the methodology section to define the bounded system – or specific district – included within the study.

**Organization of Study**

Chapter 1 of this study presented the background and purpose of the study, as well as a statement of the problem, definition of the research questions, outline of the conceptual framework, and a review relevant terms. Chapter 2 contained the theoretical framework for the study and a review of literature to include preparation of principals, position and responsibilities of school leadership, the instructional leadership position, and the evaluation of school leaders. Chapter 3 described the methodology of the study by restating the research questions and defining the research design. Chapter 3 contained the worldview and research traditions, participant information, instruments used, the process for data collection, and trustworthiness ethics. Chapter 4 described the findings within the research and details the participants. It is organized by the four themes and sub themes identified in the data analysis and contains details from the two mini cases. Chapter 5 detailed the conclusions, implications, and future research recommendations as identified by the findings.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Assistant principals have been characterized as a “wasted resource” (Harvey, 1994, p.17) and the “forgotten man” (Glanz, 1994, p. 283) and are often underrepresented in the professional literature (Glanz, 1994; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Ribbins, 1997). For this literature review, Kennesaw State University’s online library provided the primary search engine, more specifically including the databases of ERIC and JSTOR. Google Scholar and ProQuest verified the literature and offered for an expansion of the research field. In searching keywords within these databases, searching broad descriptors then narrowing the filed to identify specific literature on the position of the assistant principal proved beneficial in locating specific descriptors. These descriptors included position/position of the assistant principal, assistant principal as the instructional leader, pathway from assistant principal to principal, evaluation of assistant principals, preparation of assistant principals, and transition of assistant principal to principal. Eliminated documents focused primarily on the principal. The searching of descriptors revealed a scarce amount of current research, that is to say, research that has been conducted within the last 10 years was limited. Therefore, this study included older and more dated research that was nonetheless relevant and necessary for the study. Additional descriptors which focused upon the conceptual and theoretical framework included adult learning theory, role theory and social cognitive theory.

Throughout the literature, it is evident that the position of the assistant principal has changed since its inception. More specifically over the past 30 years, the changes have been minimal considering the external pressures for school accountability and achievement. In
evaluating the amount of research conducted on the assistant principal, the body of work is marginal compared to other school leadership positions, including that of the principal. In journals and books on educational leadership, the position of the assistant principal is less investigated compared only to the principal (Weller & Weller, 2002).

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is linked to the conceptual framework and addressed the concept of adult learning and how adults apply their learning to applications in their work. The assumptions of andragogy used to build this framework are adult learning experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning. The accumulation of experiences an adult has builds his/her learning and understanding. These experiences are problem-centered and immediately applicable to his/her environment. Additionally, an adult’s readiness to learn is built from his/her social roles. This study investigated roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal and principal. How an assistant principal learns is directly related to his/her roles and experiences. These experiences and what an assistant principal learns, coupled with his/her environment and norms, can affect that person’s preparation for the principalship.

The theoretical framework for this study comes from a study by Mertz (2000) who used role theory to define his theoretical framework and study of school leadership. Similarly, role theory was used to influence and inform the findings of this study. Role theory is cited throughout literature and used often in schools and educational studies, and suggests that “the role one holds in an organizational social system carries with it powerful norms and behavioral expectations” (Mertz, 2000, p.5). Further, the “observable behavior of individuals holding a position is a function of the organizationally defined positions and expectations” (p.5). Additionally, “role socialization which is how a person learns to adapt and behave given the
context of their position and profession” (p.5). This study illustrated the position of the assistant principal in preparation for the principalship and role theory provided a concrete framework from which to research.

The concept of role theory stems from the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as defined by Bandura (Bandura, 1986). This learning theory holds that behavior is acquired through observation or expectations and that there is a direct relationship between changes in behavior and a person’s self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Figure 1 illustrates the concepts of SCT by looking closer at SCT and its contribution to role theory and at its relevant connection to this study.

Bandura (1986) concluded that one’s behavior is influenced by three reciprocal factors – cognitive/personal, behavioral, and environmental. The cognitive/personal factors are based on the knowledge, expectations, and attitudes that a person has when he/she enters a new situation. For instance, an assistant principal’s attitude or expectation toward his/her role affects that person’s behavior and ability to perform. If the assistant principal believes that the role he or she possesses is valuable and necessary for preparation as a principal, his/her behavior will be influenced. What assistant principals expect of his/her role versus what the actual role requires is critical in determining their overall behavior. Behavioral factors are defined by the skills, practice, and self-efficacy involved in a situation. These three factors determine the behavior of an individual which is largely influenced by the feedback received based on a learned behavior. As result, the feedback impacts a person’s self-efficacy and overall behavior in a given role. For example, if the tasks given to assistant principals add value to their role in preparation for the principalship and encourages positive feedback from their principal, assistant principals’ self-efficacy will increase and impact their learned behavior.
Finally, the third factor is based on the environment in which a person is able to complete a behavior. The environment is rooted in the social norms, access within a community, and influence over others. Looking through the lens of the assistant principal, the socialization of the role directly impacts the learned behavior. As discussed in the literature review, the role and responsibilities of an assistant principal are loosely defined and vary significantly. This study highlighted how environmental factors impact the learned behavior of an assistant principal in preparation for the principalship.

Figure 1

Role Theory and Social Cognitive Theory

This study addressed the specifics of the role of the assistant principal in preparation for the principalship. Role theory, which stemmed from SCT, was used as the theoretical framework for this study as it applies to how an assistant principal behaves and adapts in his/her current position. Using role theory as the theoretical framework provides the premise that the definition, roles and responsibilities, and expectations in the assistant principal position impacts learned behavior that could impact the preparation for the principalship. The theory holds four main assumptions (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975):

1. Roles are defined by a person and others based on their social learning and reading.
2. Expectations are created by a person regarding the role he/she and others will play.
3. Role expectations and actions are encouraged for others by a person.
4. A person will adopt and act within a particular role.

This role theory framework defines the importance of position definition and responsibilities as they relate to the assistant principalship. The literature showed that an assistant principal’s role and expectations are defined by the principal and/or environment, expectations of the specific role that are also encouraged by their school or district, and although their position varies, assistant principals adapt to their situation. This is parallel to the SCT that described the importance of the learned behavior of an assistant principal. If the actual versus ideal responsibilities of the role are not aligned, an assistant principal’s learned behavior impacts career satisfaction, performance, evaluation, and aspirations.

The details of andragogy and the SCT provided a cohesive context for this study. Understanding one’s learned behavior and how it impacts knowledge and roles were included in the research. This study used the personal perceptions of the participants to draw conclusions regarding the research questions.
Review of Literature

The topics in the literature review are: historical perspective, principal preparation, position and responsibilities of an assistant principal, instructional leadership versus management, and evaluation of school leaders. The purpose of this literature review is to understand how the principal and assistant principal positions and responsibilities relate, the characteristics that make effective leaders, the pathway from the assistant principal position to the principalship, and how perceptions and understanding of his/her role as an assistant principal affects succession planning. It should be noted that some of the empirical research dates back further than ten years. The inclusion of this dated material serves two purposes; first that limited research on this topic exists and second that all literature found was relevant to the purpose of the study. Another related area of the literature review that supports the study is the analysis of the leadership evaluation tool in Georgia, the Leader Keys (GADOE, 2013), as it pertains to assistant principals versus principals (see Figure 2) and to establish agreement between these positions on expectations for leadership behaviors.
**LKES Domains and Performance Standards**

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**Historical Perspective**

In an extensive literature review of the role of the assistant principal, Rogers (2009) found that since the inception of the position in 1845, the main focus of the assistant principal has been managerial. Assistant principals were general supervisors that relieved the principal of some duties and responsibilities and were often described as clerical (Rogers, 2009). Rogers
(2009) also noted that most duties of the assistant principal have been assigned by the principal and that many of these duties have varied from school to school.

Rogers (2009) also found that as of the 1960’s the position began to “increase in importance” (p.26). Throughout the following three decades, studies have shown that defining the position of the assistant principal was of interest that included participation in instructional practice. Scheduling, testing, supervision of students and staff, student discipline, conducting faculty meetings, and athletics/extracurricular activities remained at the forefront of the position of the assistant principal through much of the literature (Rogers, 2009).

Marshall and Hooley (2006) described the historical background of the position of the assistant principal as a response to redefining and consolidating schools and increased enrollment at the turn of the century. Mertz and McNeely (1999) contended that the position was created out of need and lacked sufficient planning in defining the position. Marshall and Hooley held that the assistant principal position is critical in the success of the current educational system. First, they stated that the assistant principal is the first step to administrative positions. By using the position to observe and interact with current principals, the position is key in developing leaders. Next, they determined that the assistant principal is critical to developing and sustaining school rules and culture. The assistant principal first examines the infraction and talks with the teacher(s) and the student(s), reaches a conclusion, and enforces the discipline code appropriately. Additionally, they are responsible for maintaining order and “frequently play the position of the mediator, addressing the conflicts that emerge among teachers, students, and the community” (p.2).

**Preparation for the Principalship**

Marshall (1992) found that little consideration has been given to the position of the assistant principal in preparation for the principalship. Assistant principals have commented that
after receiving a principalship they thought they were ill-prepared for the position (Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2010; Kwan, 2009) and previous positions had failed to prepare them adequately to lead schools (Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2010; Koru, 1993; Kwan, 2009). In previous years and ending in 2007, leadership preparation programs had been criticized for their lack of relevancy to current school needs, having low admission standards, and professors with little or no administrative background (Davis, et al., 2005; Levine, 2005). Golanda (1991) uniquely described the preparation of the assistant principal by relating it to osmosis. Golanda (1991) characterized the methods of preparation of the assistant principal by a series of varied and random experiences that over time will help shape the assistant principal’s knowledge and skill base for the principalship.

A statement from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2000) addressed the leadership development of principals and assistant principals. The statement read:

Be it, therefore, resolved by the National Association of Secondary School Principals that … [school] districts provide funding and opportunities to engage principals and assistant principals in ongoing, sustained, job embedded leadership development that focuses on knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will improve a principal’s or assistant principal’s ability to lead and manage middle level and high school in an optimal fashion (p. 2).

Marshall and Hooley (2006) stated, “assistant principals are usually selected because of their visibility and success as teachers, department heads, counselors, or administrative interns” (p.13). If they adapted to the varied responsibilities and traditions, they were promoted to the principalship. The process for selection and preparation are so varied that “many talented, innovative educational leaders are rejected for entry-level administrative positions” (p.13). Some
candidates experience the position of the assistant principal and choose not to enter the pool of leaders for an administrative career as a principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Research surrounding the assistant principal showed that the assistant principal position is a necessary step to becoming a principal, but the actual responsibilities of the position do not create a seamless conversion (Denmark & Davis, 2000). DuFour (1999) described five crucial duties of the principal:

1. Sharing values and vision to lead – rather than ruling with procedures.
2. Sharing decision-making and empowering teachers.
3. Emphasizing good decision making by communicating and providing training.
4. Focusing on results.
5. Designing good questioning that promotes collaborative thinking versus forced solutions (p.12-17).

Murphy (1998) concluded that principals are under high demands from society and are consistently held accountable for serving students and enforcing new reforms for success. Wheeler and Agruso (1996) recommended that to prepare assistant principals, principals should work collaboratively with them in the decision-making process and provide support, coaching, and guidance.

Goodson (2000) wrote about two key parts to the assistant principal position. First, the assistant principal position is necessary for preparation and training for further leadership, and second, it facilitates important administrative tasks. Madden (2008) asserted that “the preparation of future principals is a vital aspect for maintaining the momentum of providing viable school leadership” (p.2). Similarly, the work of Koru (1993) concluded that “during the time a future
principal spends as an assistant principal, he or she is engaged in activities that offer little preparation for the kind of leadership expected of principals” (p.71).

Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) conducted a mixed methods study of assistant principals with varied tenure in the position. The researchers analyzed a cross-section of assistant principals from different geographical areas and school levels. One-third of their participants had three or fewer years of experience and two-thirds had three or more years of experience. During the interviews, participants discussed the areas that they were most prepared for when assuming the position of assistant principal, professional development and preparation for the position, mentoring relationships available to them, characteristics of a successful assistant principal, and what they liked most and least about the position. Findings of this study showed that assistant principals were most prepared for working with people, understanding expectations of their role, and possessing the important skills needed for this position. Participants, especially those with under three years of experience, were least prepared for the position itself, certain job expectations, and tensions with staff (Barnett, et al., 2012). They stated that “new and experienced assistant principals perceived the job to be fast paced and overwhelming, resulting in frustration in not being able to manage their time and complete tasks efficiently and effectively” (p.116).

Madden (2008) conducted a study that aimed to inform current principals on the practice of preparation for an assistant principal and the type of support he/she needed in the position. Acting principals suggested that while in the position, assistant principals must learn as much as they can about the principal position (Busch, et al., 2010). Some assistant principals are eager to move forward while others are content and satisfied with their position (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).
Researchers have concluded that school districts have a duty to prepare assistant principals by providing relevant, performance based training and experiences as part of their responsibilities to enhance their professional position (Burgess, 1973; Lovely, 1999; Wheeler & Agruso, 1996). A 2004 study conducted by the National Association for Elementary School Principals, as cited by Rogers (2009), reported that nearly two-thirds of the then sitting principals planned to retire by 2014. This statement asserted that assistant principals will need to sharpen their skills as a principal to properly fill those principal positions. In their 2001 study, Bloom and Krovetz found that the quick transition from assistant principal to principal is one factor in the shortage of principals. They stated, “In these days of principal shortages, we have found that many assistant principals and resource teachers are moving into principalships after serving for relatively short periods of time in these preparatory positions” (p.12). Bloom and Krovetz (2001) also noted that the tasks assigned to the assistant principal failed to prepare them for duties in budget and curriculum needed for the principalship, but focused on discipline and student activities. Madden (2008) believed that “recent research indicated that the assistant principal position does not provide the appropriate training or preparation for assistant principals to become principals (p.3).”

Holmes (2001) researched and evaluated the elements of leadership. He concluded that developed communication skills differentiated leaders from managers. Leaders were able to guide and motivate others by communicating properly versus managers who lead with demands, instructions, and directives. Holmes (2001) also held that in order to be successful, administrators must be able to lead and manage others with strong communication skills. Effective administrators can inspire others through the implementation of policies while empowering them to follow their vision.
Assistant Principal Role Definition and Responsibilities

There is an absence of a concrete definition of the role of the assistant principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). This lack of understanding creates a variety of inconsistent roles and responsibilities for each assistant principal. The range of duties exemplified how assistant principals positions are not clearly defined (Kwan, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The lack of research and understanding around the position and duties of an assistant principal add to the confusion around their responsibilities (Rogers, 2009). Additionally, Frazier (2002) noted that most studies identify the role of the assistant principal as being managerial in nature. Discipline and student management remain at the forefront of an assistant principal’s responsibilities (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Marshall and Hooley (2006) stated that “by taking a look at what assistant principals do, we can begin to identify the special nature, the functions served, and the inherent dilemmas in their job” (p.4).

Marshall and Hooley (2006) concluded that the principal not only defines the role of the assistant principal, but also defines the relationship between them. They also found that assistant principals lead school management along with curriculum and instruction. They determined that in addition to the managerial tasks assigned by the principal, such as lockers, duties, safety, and discipline, assistant principals are tasked with supporting the curriculum and instruction. Good (2008) described the daily activities of assistant principals as comprised of the three B’s – “books, behinds, and buses” (p. 46). Similarly, Porter (1996) defined an assistant principal’s role as the “daily operations chief” (p.26) who acts as a caretaker (Harvey, 1994) and policeman (Koru, 1993), while monitoring student safety, mediating conflicts, watching the hallways, and imposing the rules of the school (Kaplan & Owings, 1999). An older study by Austin and Brown (1970) determined that as a whole, assistant principals lacked duties that involved active problem
solving. They concluded that “a do-as-your told policy in assigning duties to members of an administrative team is very short-sighted one as measured by the well-being of the school” (p.47).

Glanz (2004) looked at various studies and affirmed that there is no particular list of tasks of the assistant principal. The premise of the Rogers (2009) study was to analyze the position with respect to instructional leadership of the middle school assistant principal in Virginia. Rogers (2009) conducted a quantitative study of 194 middle school assistant principals. The instrument used was a modified Sources of Instructional Leadership Instrument (SOIL) survey and allowed respondents to rank, based on percentage of time, duties within a given work week. This report showed that “[they] spend a significant amount of time working with developing school climate, discipline, and giving teachers feedback on instruction” (Rogers, 2009, p. 119). The implications from his review of literature ranging from 1997-2004 noted that there is a “need for assistant principals to be directly involved in instructional leadership just as principals are” (Rogers, 2009, p. 125). Rogers (2009) suggested that a “clear and defined position of the assistant principal would impact their instructional focus” (p. 132). Rogers (2009) documented that minimal instructional leadership responsibility have been assigned to assistant principals as of late. Additionally, the instructional opportunities for leaders vary from school to school, thus impacting an assistant principal’s ability to conduct instructional leadership.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) found that although a definite job description of the assistant principal is absent and can vary from school to school, the job does include five common tasks:

1. Hold conferences with parents and students. In some cases, these are pre-arranged and designed to create or support goals for students or can be a quick resolution to a situation.
2. Monitor and handle discipline. This can be a proactive plan for creating a positive and supportive culture or dealing with a code of conduct violation.

3. Design and manage the master scheduling for teachers and students. They assist with registration and attendance of students and work to help with smooth transitions for large events.

4. Work directly with students to identify strengths and successes and guide them in their educational decisions.

5. Focus on public relations tasks regarding school events, community partnerships, and student activities.

Some assistant principals want to be involved with curriculum and instruction. Additionally, the recent shift in school leadership evaluations have assistant principals completing classroom observations and teacher evaluations (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Surveys of assistant principals over the last 40 years indicated that the tasks and positions of the assistant principal had changed little over the years. The most defining change was in the addition of teacher motivation and observation (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Armstrong (2004) conducted a survey of 1,250 secondary assistant principals in Texas and highlighted the changes in the assistant principal position based on educational changes, such as restructuring and high stakes testing. Armstrong’s study (2004) showed that 37 percent of assistant principals change or rotate their positions and responsibilities each year. Additionally, 67 percent of assistant principals were content in their positions. The study also noted that there was a high satisfaction rate among assistant principals when there was a lower rate of student mobility.
Role of the Assistant Principal

For some assistant principals it is easy to adapt and take charge of tasks as they arise, regardless of other expectations (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Although there is a set of determined responsibilities that are based upon need and/or crisis, the assistant principal may obtain additional unplanned duties throughout the day. Marshall and Hooley (2006) stated that “the assistant principal seldom has a consistent, well-defined job description, delineation of duties, or way of measuring outcomes from accomplishment of tasks” (p.7).

Current research reveals role ambiguity trends for the assistant principal role. Role ambiguity is defined by Marshall and Hooley (2006):

Role ambiguity means that the assistant principal’s positions and duties include many “gray areas” – ill-defined, inconsistent, and at times incoherent responsibilities, positions and resources. For example, assistant principals’ responsibilities may not include employing substitutes but may include handling the problems that ensure when substitutes are not screened (p. 7).

This role ambiguity leads to assistant principals experiencing a “lack of job satisfaction, emotional problems, a sense of futility or ineffectiveness, and a lack of confidence” (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 7). Role ambiguity is most closely related to role conflict, which is another consideration in analyzing the position of the assistant principal.

Role conflict occurs when the tasks, as defined by position, clash with the purposes of day-to-day duties (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). One example of this within the assistant principalship role is when assistant principals are asked to support teachers in developing curriculum but then required to observe and evaluate them. This role conflict also exists for
assistant principals when their actual duties contrast with the work they desire as professionals.

For instance:

Constant monitoring of student discipline may require so much time that assistant principals must forsake creative programming in curricular innovation, proactive discipline management, or using their special expertise (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 8).

Role conflict has a direct impact on the performance of the assistant principal when the daily demands of the position make it difficult or impossible to perform those assigned duties needed for their evaluation (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Role conflict is also responsible for overload and frustration of the assistant principal. Marshall and Hooley (2006) noted that many give up “so much time, energy, and emotion that little is left for [their] personal life or professional development” (p. 8). Assistant principals will often become discouraged when they are asked to take on additional projects or responsibilities of interest without support or follow through from the principal (Mertz, 2000).

When analyzing the role of the assistant principal, Marshall and Hooley (2006) highlighted career satisfaction and incentives of the position. The researchers noted a study by Croft and Morton (1977), (as cited by Marshall and Hooley 2006), which indicated that assistant principals had higher job satisfaction when their duties involved less clerical tasks and more administrative tasks (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 9). In relation to incentives of the position, assistant principals noted that the ability to use the position as a pathway to the principalship and promotion was the most powerful incentive (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Sutter’s (1996) research presented evidence to show the relationship in job satisfaction for assistant principals and an interest in becoming principals. In this study, 416 assistant principals in Ohio were surveyed regarding their current position and career aspirations.
Respondents were given a survey to analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic values in job satisfaction. The findings, at a .01 alpha level of statistical significance, found that if assistant principals perceived their current position as a favorable one, they had increased career aspirations, i.e., they viewed their current position as preparation for the principalship. However, a continued lack of research focused on perception and satisfaction of the position, career aspirations, and ideal versus actual responsibilities which exists for the assistant principal (Kwan & Walker, 2012, p.5).

Marshall and Hooley (2006) used older studies that showed the progression of the position and experiences that led career advancement in educational leadership positions. One key finding was that “the elementary principalship appears to be a dead-end position, while the secondary principalship provides opportunities for systemwide links (Carlson, 1972; Gaertner, 1980; Gallant, 1980; Ortiz, 1982 as cited in Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 10). When faced with the inability for promotion, based on tasks, exposure, or restrictions, assistant principals ended their careers in the position (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

The relationship with the principal is key for assistant principals. Research has determined that the principal assigns the duties and responsibilities of the assistant principals and often represent those tasks that are unwanted by the principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Sharing responsibilities of discipline, teacher observations, and data collection facilitated better relationship and collaboration for assistant principals. Additionally it provides a more conducive learning environment for assistant principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Madden (2008) found similar results in her research on assistant principals. By surveying assistant principals to address the actual versus ideal responsibilities, the study found that there were differences in tasks which affect preparation for the principalship. Findings showed that
there were three groups of tasks that ranked the highest in priority for preparing principals as suggested by assistant principals (Madden, 2008). The most important priority was on tasks related to human resources; working with parents, students, and personnel. Next were tasks focused on instructional leadership; curriculum, teacher support, and involvement in new programs. Lastly, tasks that dealt with the management of the school; facilities, politics, and delegating authority (Madden, 2008). Madden’s (2008) findings also affirmed that assistant principals ranked ideal tasks higher than the actual tasks they performed, emphasizing the concept that the position is not an effective training pathway to the principalship. The overall result of the study indicated that in transitioning to the principalship, assistant principals lacked skills necessary to be successful (Madden, 2008).

With the assistant principals’ responsibilities centered on managerial tasks and with an emphasis on principals to increase their position as instructional leaders, there appeared a discrepancy in the parallel positions. The expectation that the assistant principal position is the proper preparation for the principalship may be inaccurate based on current responsibilities.

Focus on Instructional Leadership v. Management

Driving support for instruction and supporting curriculum are necessary elements for the success of a school and is considered a necessary skill for school leaders. Murphy (1998) suggested that instruction and curriculum need to become critical pieces of the principal’s leadership skill set. For the purpose of her study, Madden (2008) indicated that instructional leadership was most commonly defined as the support of teachers and development of the curriculum to best support student achievement. Celikten (2001) claimed that regardless of the official definition, instructional leadership is about creating conducive learning environments for students and monitoring the curriculum to support that curriculum. In his study, Koru (1993)
reported that assistant principals do not have adequate opportunities for instructional leadership. Instead, they are focused on disciplinary action and mediation of parents, teachers, and students. Madden (2008) added that “the instructional leader or assistant principal must be visible, solve problems, initiate community awareness, provide staff support, communicate a vision, optimize school resources, provide teacher in-service, develop the school schedule, and promote a positive school culture” (p.15).

DeFour (2002) stated, “educators are gradually redefining the role of the principal from instructional leader with a focus on teacher, to a leader of a professional community with a focus on learning” (p.15). Bamburg and Andrews (1990) explained that instructional leadership actions are grouped together and can be described as:

1. A resource provider that: (a) marshals personnel and resources to achieve a school’s mission and goals and (b) is knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction.
2. An instructional resource that: (a) sets expectations for continual improvement of instructional programs and actively engages the use of different instructional strategies.
3. An effective communicator that: (a) models commitment to school goals (b) articulates a vision of instructional goals and the means for integrating instructional planning and goal attainment and (c) sets and adheres to clear performance standards for instruction and teacher behavior.
4. A visible presence that visits classrooms, attends departmental or grade-level meetings, is accessible to discuss matters dealing with instruction, and is an active participant in staff development (pp.17-19, as cited in Madden, 2008, p.25).

In his study of new principal and assistant principals, Grodski (2011) noted that at the system level, participants had a hard time defining the position of a school leader. Participants
stated “expectations that instructional leadership would take precedence over all other activities” (p.8). In contrast, school level administrators perceived as though they were unable to complete the system(s)’ expectations and “some felt unappreciated and undervalued by the system” (p.8). In interviewing school leaders across the systems, Grodski shared one senior administrator’s comment:

They can’t just be a manager. And that’s what we are finding that happens to them because it’s so difficult. Because the day-to-day world is about management. But to move up, right now, you can’t. You’ve got to be leading teachers in instruction and assessment. (p.15).

Golanda’s (1991) research demonstrated that the duties of an assistant principal are managerial in nature rather than related to leadership and provided a very narrow scope of leadership responsibilities. Madden (2008) also concluded that the position of the assistant principal is managerial and focuses on completing tasks, while in contrast, the principal has the position of influencing, guiding, and leading others to action. Many local school administrators believed that the managerial requirements of the job took precedent over the expected instruction leadership duties (Grodski, 2011). Further, system and local school administrators had varying viewpoints on the reality and requirements of the position. Grodski (2011) stated that “no solutions were given” by the system and that the senior level administrators held that school required both a high-level of managerial skills and effective instructional leadership level administrators (p.16). Grodski’s (2011) work further cited the “lack of a clear definition of the position” to be confusing and misleading for new administrators (p.17). Brewer (2001) suggested that the role of an instructional leader includes:
Focusing on instruction; building a community of learners; sharing decision making; sustaining the basics; leveraging time; supporting ongoing professional development for all staff members; redirecting resources to support a multifaceted school plan; and creating a climate of integrity, inquiry, and continuous improvement (p. 30).

Cranston, et al. (2004) reported that the position of the assistant principal is changing to incorporate a more instructional focus. Looking at the principalship as an instructional leadership position, Finkel (2012) quoted Chenoweth for the Education Trust, who stated that:

“… [T]raditionally, principals were really not instructional leaders….They tended to be building problem-solvers-putting out little fires. Many aren’t prepared to do that [instructional leadership] job. They were gym teachers, and they had a good relationship with the superintendent. That’s not a good recipe for instructional leadership” (p. 51, original citation unknown).

She continued by noting that those principals who “define themselves as instructional leaders typically have the most success,” especially in difficult schools and schools with the most at-risk students (Finkel, 2012, p. 51). Chenoweth held that principals need to be collaborative in their accountability efforts and work to coach and guide teachers in the classroom. They must have a developed understanding of content and pedagogy. “Rather than letting the managerial work cloud their daily activities, the principal must dedicate their school time to classroom work with teachers” (Finkel, 2012, p. 54). By knowing these details about the principalship, it appears that assistant principals must work to align their responsibilities to better prepare them as a possible candidate for the principalship.

Howard-Schwind (2010) conducted a quantitative study that evaluated the instructional leadership duties of 275 secondary assistant principals in large Texas high schools. The 50 item
survey asked participants to rank dimensions of specific job functions. The findings of the study showed that assistant principals perceived themselves and their principals as exhibiting a high regularity of instructional leadership; perceptions of both the assistant principals and principals as they related to instructional leadership were similar, and under recent national and state requirements, both assistant principals and principals engaged in more instructional leadership. Overall implications of this research suggested that “administrative roles and responsibilities in high schools should be restructured to allow assistant principals to focus on instructional leadership” (p. 85).

Some research stated that instructional leadership is also a high priority of assistant principals including developing the schedule, managing curriculum and instruction, using data to drive change, and providing professional development (Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Lashway, 2007). As increased accountability presents itself for schools and school leaders, the assistant principal must have a more defined instructional leadership position.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided support for work with school systems in the area of instructional leadership (Fink & Silverman, 2014). The overall responsibility of the work was to provide principals with the training and support necessary to be effective instructional leaders. The University of Washington’s Center for Educational Leadership created a principal support framework and with it, designed three areas of support (Fink & Silverman, 2014). The three action areas were:

1. Action Area #1 – A shared vision of principals as instructional leaders.
2. Action Area #2 – A system of support for developing principals as instructional leaders.
3. Action Area #3 – Making it possible for principals to be instructional leaders (p.24).

District leaders in Shelby County, TN, Tulsa, OK, Albany, NY, and Bellingham, WA have implemented practices to support principals in instructional leadership (Fink & Silverman, 2014). These districts determined that “reciprocal accountability” was required for principals (Fink & Silverman, 2014, p.25). This meant that in order to hold principals accountable for instructional leadership, the district was responsible for providing professional learning and support. Fink and Silverman (2014) noted that in order to ensure quality of instructional leadership and effective principals, district leaders must create supports around their expectations for principals and assistant principals.

Evaluation of School Leadership

The evaluation of the assistant principals varies and can be less structured than that of a principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Coupled with the fact that in most cases the duties, responsibility, and functioning of the assistant principal vary from school to school, the consistency in evaluating the assistant principal is difficult (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). In addition, these evaluations are often used to determine if the assistant principal will be promoted, which adds to the stress and difficulty of the position.

Based on the current research and the evaluation system in Georgia, called the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES), (GADOE, 2013), assistant principals, as well as all educational leaders, must add to their focus instructional leadership skills. Of the eight standards included in the Leader Assessment on Performance Standards (LAPS) instructional leadership, planning and assessment, and teacher/staff evaluation can be directly tied to instructional leadership. In addition, 70% of the Leaders Effectiveness Measure (LEM) ties to instructional
leadership by way of student growth, achievement gap, and student learning objectives (GADOE, 2013). As the research suggested, assistant principals need a clear and established definition of the assistant principal/instructional leadership position.

An examination of the LKES components, and the evaluation of the position of the assistant principal, revealed there are differences between the two. In examining the LKES implementation handbook (GADOE, 2014), the document described in detail how evaluators should assess a leaders’ performance. When comparing the current position of the assistant principal against the LKES expectations, researchers found the two did not necessarily correlate. For example, when looking at the eight LKES performance standards (see Figure 2), current assistant principals focus their work heavily on Standard Five – Human Resource Management, Six – Teacher/Staff Evaluation, Seven - Professionalism, and Eight – Communication and Community Relations (GADOE, 2014). Human resources management, teacher/staff evaluation, professionalism, and communication and community relations are described as current positions of assistant principals. Actual responsibilities and duties only fall loosely into these categories. Dealing with student discipline, coordinating the master schedule, and organizing standardized testing could be considered to be under the umbrella of professionalism, organizational management, and communication. Standard One: Instructional Leadership, School Climate, and Planning and Assessment are new areas that have yet to be defined by the current position of the assistant principal (Finkel, 2012; Glanz, 2009; Grodski, 2011; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Lashway, 2007; Rogers, 2009). These areas will be difficult for evaluators to assess with our current assistant principals. Ratings within the standards are as follows; Level IV, Level III, Level II, and Level 1; Level IV being the highest rating and Level I being the lowest. The terminology used within the standards prohibits assistant principals from reaching Level IV and
Level III ratings. In order to receive these ratings, the assistant principal must repeat the action continually or consistently, respectively, to receive the Level IV and Level III ratings (GADOE, 2014).

Figure 2

**LKES Domains and Performance Standards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Instructional Leadership</strong> The leader fosters the success of all students by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to school improvement.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. School Climate</strong> The leader promotes the success of all students by developing, advocating, and sustaining an academically rigorous, positive, and safe school climate for all stakeholders.</td>
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<th>Organizational Leadership</th>
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<td><strong>3. Planning and Assessment</strong> The leader effectively gathers, analyzes, and uses a variety of data to inform planning and decision-making consistent with established guidelines, policies, and procedures.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Organizational Management</strong> The leader fosters the success of all students by supporting, managing, and overseeing the school’s organization, operation, and use of resources.</td>
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<th>Human Resources Leadership</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5. Human Resources Management</strong> The leader fosters effective human resources management through the selection, induction, support, and retention of quality instructional and support personnel.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6. Teacher/Staff Evaluation</strong> The leader fairly and consistently evaluates school personnel in accordance with state and district guidelines and provides them with timely and constructive feedback focused on improved student learning.</td>
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<th>Professionalism and Communication</th>
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<td><strong>7. Professionalism</strong> The leader fosters the success of students by demonstrating professional standards and ethics, engaging in continuous professional development, and contributing to the profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Communication and Community Relations</strong> The leader fosters the success of all students by communicating and collaborating effectively with stakeholders.</td>
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Depending on the specific role of the assistant principal, the climate survey, which is a key component of the Leader Effectiveness Measure, can be skewed for that assistant principal.
Although the surveys have been assessed for reliability and validity and have been accepted, statements such as, “my principal takes an active position in improving curriculum and instruction” (GADOE, 2014, p. 14) could be inaccurate for assistant principals who are not involved in instructional leadership. For instance, some assistant principals may be involved in partnering with teams in the content areas, but if they lack understanding of the content, or if they are unable to support it, their impact on faculty and student growth will be negligible.

During the 2011-2012 school year, the Georgia Department of Education conducted a pilot evaluation of the new LKES evaluation tool (GADOE, 2012). This evaluation assessed the verification and validation of the tool directly. The report noted that there was consistency in implementation with the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES) (GADOE, 2012, p. 19). Focus group members who commented on the evaluation tool for LKES cited that there was “an emphasis on the principal being an instructional leader,” but the district personnel noted that they needed training on how to use the tool for coaching and mentoring school leaders (GADOE, 2012, p. 42).

The LKES (GADOE, 2014) tool provides a clear expectation of the position of principal. It addresses performance indicators most associated with the position. The assistant principal position is varied and different, questioning the use of the tool in coaching and developing these candidates to become a principal. In order for this tool to be the most effective resource for assistant principals, their current position must be redefined and reshaped. As of now, it appears that principals may need more coaching on how to use the current tool in assessing the performance of assistant principals. What is known is that all school leaders directly impact student performance (National Association of Secondary School Principals & National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2012). Rather than adjust the tool to fit the current
managerial model of the assistant primary position, there appears a need to redesign and redefine their duties and responsibilities. In January 2016, the requirements for an Educational Leadership certificate changed to include increased responsibilities for candidates seeking certification (GaPSC, 2016). The Georgia Professional Standards Commission rule 505-2-.153, included a tiered certification process. Tier I certificates are issued to leaders with a bachelor’s degree and who are in positions not supervising principals. Tier II certificates require a master’s degree and enrollment in a performance based leadership program. Tier II candidates are required to have documented performance based experiences which can include an internship or mentorship component. Tier II certification is considered to be the highest and those certified may work in any position in the district or school and are able to supervise principals. The performance based requirement during graduate school is aimed at exposing school leaders to various situations and providing opportunities to learn and reflect. This may be the most effective and efficient way of ensuring that assistant principals are being developed as principals and instructional leaders.

**Summary**

Focus on the assistant principal in educational research is limited. The predominant theme across the available research is that the position of the assistant principal differs greatly across various assistant principals. As noted, the succession plan for the principalship includes time as an assistant principal. In order to be successful, assistant principals must have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the position, as well as in the instructional tasks they are required to do. They also require proper feedback and professional development and a clear understanding of how they are evaluated.

This chapter reviewed relevant research related to the assistant principal. The chapter began with a description of the historical background of the assistant principal and the evolution
of the position over the last 150 years. Research demonstrated how assistant principals are prepared for the principalship role and also noted how most assistant principals feel unprepared for the position as an assistant principal. Various studies described roles and responsibilities of assistant principals. Assistant principals’ official responsibilities vary across school levels and states that further create ambiguity within the position.

The chapter then detailed the roles and responsibilities related to instructional leadership. Based on existing research presented in this chapter, the studies indicated the assistant principal’s position is underdeveloped in instructional leadership. Finally, this section addressed the current evaluation of school leadership in the state of Georgia. This portion provided a comparison between the actual and expected responsibilities of an assistant principal and its impact on accountability.

This research study provided a look at concepts defined in the background of this study. It provided cause for further research and a careful look at the role of the assistant principal in preparation for the principalship. This study examined the position of the assistant principal as a pathway to the principalship by seeking perspectives of assistant principals and principals in a large metropolitan school system in the southeast based on the current evaluation instrument as a guidance for expectations in the role.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the position of the assistant principal as a pathway to the principalship. Specifically, it addressed both the assistant principal and principal positions and identify the actual versus ideal job responsibilities.

This study is comprised of a qualitative phenomenological case study. By nature, case studies involve a small target population. The researcher addressed a diverse group of participants for the case study to provide richer and more applicable findings.

The researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training in accordance with IRB requirements and received approval from Kennesaw State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) on March 3, 2016 (See Appendix A). An application for research within the system was submitted and approved on April 1, 2016 (See Appendix B).

Research Questions

This phenomenological case study addressed one main research question;

2) Does the assistant principal position prepare candidates for the principalship?

Additional questions related to the practical goals driving the case study and incorporate the phenomenological dimension of the study:

c) To what extent do assistant principals view their position as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?

d) To what extent do principals view the position of the assistant principal as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?
Research Design

Worldview and Research Tradition

The approach to this research study was interpretive, using qualitative research methods. The researcher used interviews, field notes, and observations to gather data. The four main worldviews that qualitative researchers (Mertens, 2010) can bring to their studies and use in research are post positivism, constructivism, transformative, and pragmatism. Postpositivism is typically used in quantitative research and focuses on a single reality where objectivity by the researcher is key. Constructivism considers multiple views of participants and constructs realities and theories about the research. The transformative worldview addresses social justice and historical issues. Finally, the pragmatism seeks to gain knowledge based on the researchers’ views and ideals. It holds that there is a single reality but multiple interpretations of reality as presented by the participant. Additionally, within pragmatism, individual researchers have a freedom of choice and are free to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes. This study was an interpretive and naturalistic study which, by further definition, allows the researcher to use a pragmatic worldview (Creswell, 2013).
Figure 3

Worldviews in Qualitative Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Beliefs</th>
<th>Postpositivism</th>
<th>Constructivism</th>
<th>Transformative</th>
<th>Pragmatic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axiology (study of ethical behavior)</strong></td>
<td>Informed consent; minimize harm; justice; equal opportunity</td>
<td>Equal representation of views; raise awareness of respondents; community voice</td>
<td>Promotion of human rights; increase in social justice; respect for norms of the culture</td>
<td>Influenced by the researchers values and politics and driven by pursuit of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontology (study of reality)</strong></td>
<td>Single reality; known is within probably range</td>
<td>Socially constructed realities from many sources</td>
<td>Various versions of reality based on social stature; refuse cultural realities; recognition of social stature and version of reality</td>
<td>All individuals have personal interpretation of reality; single reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology (study of knowledge, the person who knows and the one who does not)</strong></td>
<td>Must maintain objectivity; researcher manipulates and observe unpassionate</td>
<td>Values are explicitly listed; interactive relationship between researcher and respondents</td>
<td>Interactive relationship between researcher and respondents; knowledge is socially and historically placed</td>
<td>Researcher determines what relationships are included in the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology (systematic inquiry)</strong></td>
<td>Quantitative; intervention; remove context</td>
<td>Qualitative; dialectical; context as described</td>
<td>Qualitative but quantitative and mixed methods; context and history included – particularly when oppression is related</td>
<td>Researcher works back and forth between different approaches; match questions based on purpose of research; mixed methods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The methodological approach of the study was a hybrid between two well-known research traditions in the field of qualitative research: Phenomenology and Case Study. This phenomenological case study sought to gain a deep understanding of the experiences lived by the participants. The particular phenomena studied in this research is the assistant principal role as preparation for the principalship, within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast.

Looking closely at the research tradition, phenomenology fit perfectly with the research topic, but it also represented a difficult way of conducting qualitative research, especially for a novice researcher, since there is a lack of clear steps to be followed to put it in practice (Churchill & Wertz, 2001, p.19). However, the lack of clear and methodological steps was solved by incorporating a case study, a research tradition well described in literature that has clear pathways, procedures and steps to put it in practice (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, the study was conducted within a single district -- a large metropolitan school district in the southeast, which will be the "bounded system" necessary for a case study (Stake, 2005, p.444). This methodological decision also fit appropriately with the pragmatic worldview brought by the researcher to the study.

The following case study diagram (adapted from Stake, 2005) (see Figure 4) helped structure the context, topics, data gathering techniques, mini cases to be considered, and important documents. The context in which the study took place within the school district incorporated the experiences of the assistant principals and principals within the district’s four learning communities. The district leadership created informal programs for aspiring leaders and were able to provide insight into participants’ eligible for the study. These leadership programs varied by learning community, were informal, not mandatory, and were differentiated based on the needs of the leaders in those areas. Additionally, contextual components for the study
included the district’s interview process for both assistant principals and principals and the evaluation process for both. The main data gathering activity included in this research was semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted in person or via Skype or FaceTime. The participants decided how they preferred to be interviewed. Field notes and observations were gathered during in person interviews and included as part of the noted results. The phenomenon studied in this research was the assistant principal role as preparation for the principalship. Given their current work, support, and education the question was, are assistant principals prepared to be a principal? The goals of the study created the definition of the research questions and drove the issues within the study. Issues addressed by the researcher are included within the research questions – 1) To what extent do assistant principals view their position as preparation for the principalship? and 2) To what extent do principals view the position of the assistant principal as preparation for the principalship? Topics that the researcher explored during the interviews included curriculum leadership, class teaching, professional development for staff, and principal assigned managerial tasks. These topics as proposed by Webb and Villiamy (1995), describe the responsibilities of assistant principals and principals.
The study also contained a review of the historical and social implications of school leadership. The anticipated data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used to identify the connection between the theory within the research questions and the practice of gathering data from the informants. The context of this case provided the basis to understand the relationship...
between the assistant principal position and preparation for the principalship. As previously mentioned, the assistant principal position is the precursor to becoming a principal and analyzing each role provided context for the case. This case study is bound within the system and the recommendation from system leaders of the learning communities. Interviews were conducted and designed to illustrate the experiences of both positions as a school leader.

The visual diagram provides a graphical description of the study’s design (Figure 5). It highlights first the context of the study – assistant principals and principals in a large metropolitan school system in the southeast, and then the two issues of the case study – the assistant principal position as preparation for the principalship. The four concepts addressed during the interviews were curriculum leadership, class teaching, professional development for staff, and principal assigned managerial tasks. Coding of the participants’ responses were in the areas of evaluation, roles and responsibilities, preparation, and instructional leadership. An additional matrix (Jorrín-Abellán, I.M., 2014) provided further details about the research process (Table 1). The anticipated data reduction process was used to narrow down the complexity of the issue under study. It is also a strategy to bridge the research question to the categories of analysis used to code the data from the interviews.
Figure 5

Anticipated Data Reduction Diagram

### Table 1

**Anticipated Data Reduction Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I need to know?</th>
<th>Why do I need to know this?</th>
<th>What kind of data will answer the questions?</th>
<th>Where can I find the data?</th>
<th>Whom do I contact for access?</th>
<th>Timeline for acquisition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do assistant principals view their position as preparation for the principalship?</td>
<td>To gain insight into how assistant principals view their current position as it relates to the principalship. Additional topics to be discussed in interview that will provide details: 1. Curriculum Leadership 2. Class Teaching 3. Professional Development 4. Managerial Tasks</td>
<td>Interview Question: Do you feel/believe that your position as an assistant principal is a pathway to the principalship? Areas to analyze from interview to include: 1. Evaluation of assistant principals 2. Preparation of principals 3. Roles and Responsibilities 4. Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>From participants via interview process. 30-45 minute interviews conducted via: face to face, Skype/Google Hangout/FaceTime 10 secondary assistant principals</td>
<td>IRB must be completed within district. Contact district level leadership within the learning communities for suggested participants.</td>
<td>Upon IRB approval and defense of the prospectus, the interview process will begin. Anticipated completion of interviews, July 2016 Coding, bracketing, and data dissemination, August 2016.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do principals view the position of the assistant principal as preparation for the principalship?</td>
<td>To gain insight into how principals view their position as a former assistant principal in preparation for their current position as principal. Additional topics to be discussed in interview that will provide details: 1. Curriculum Leadership 2. Class Teaching 3. Professional Development 4. Managerial Tasks</td>
<td>Interview Question: Describe your current positions as it relates to preparation for the principalship. Areas to analyze from interview to include: 1. Evaluation of assistant principals 2. Preparation of principals 3. Roles and Responsibilities 4. Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>From participants via interview process. 30-45 minute interviews conducted via: face to face, Skype/Google Hangout/FaceTime, or over the phone 7 secondary assistant principals</td>
<td>IRB must be completed within system. Contact district level leadership within the learning communities for suggested participants.</td>
<td>Upon IRB approval and defense of the prospectus, the interview process will begin. Anticipated completion of interviews, July 2016 Coding, bracketing, and data dissemination, August 2016.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

Homogeneous purposive sampling (Creswell & Plano, 2011) was used in the selection of the participants. Each participant shared a similar occupation and interest but their experience varied. The participants consisted of seven secondary assistant principals and six secondary principals within a large metropolitan school system in the southeast. The system, as a whole, contained over 80 schools with 17 high schools and 19 middle schools. More than 96,000 students were enrolled at the time of the study in the system that spanned a near 70 miles. The system was diverse academically with several nationally ranked high schools whose graduation rates was just above 50%. The student population was also diverse. More than 42% of the students were African American, 33% Caucasian, and slightly less than 11% are Asian and multi-racial. The geographic location of the schools were in direct correlation with the racial composition of the students. One part of the system was predominantly African-American, another Caucasian and Asian, and another Hispanic. Differentiated resources and support were provided to each school independently in order to meet the needs of all students.

This system also represented a diverse groups of schools. The number of participants in the study provided a representative sample of leaders from these buildings. This diverse system provides generalizability of findings across a larger population. The variety of schools creates a cross section of leaders from schools with varying socio-economic statuses and demographics. The school leaders were selected based on varying school profiles, tenure, suggestion of the county leadership, and willingness to participate. Experience in the position, geographical areas, and school levels also varied, providing for a wider implication of research findings.

The system’s leadership selection process was developed to identify the strongest candidates that match the unique needs of the individual schools. Applicants that are interested in
becoming an assistant principal or principal apply to a general job posting for the position. The talent division then screens the applicants for interviews. Interviewed candidates take part in a half day, two part experience that involves a data presentation and behavioral interview. Interviewed applicants that score well become part of a leadership pool. When openings arise at local schools, candidates are selected from the leadership pool to interview for the positions. Candidates may remain in the pool for up to one year at which time, are required to reapply. Additionally, candidates who do not score high in the interview portion are required to wait 120 days to reapply.

Due to its large size, the system was and divided into four separate learning communities. The different learning communities within the system represent differing demographics and perspectives. Using the various learning community leadership’s input regarding possible participants provided different views on experiences in the positions of the assistant principal and principal. It should be noted that some assistant principals do not aspire to become principals, other have documented poor performance evaluations, and/or others experienced the rigorous process of becoming a principal but have been rejected. Preference to interested participants was given to those who aspire to be principals, perform well, and remain positive about the principalship, as it related directly with the intended findings of the study.

Each learning community was led by an Area Superintendent and an Area Executive Director (AED). These leaders oversaw the schools within their learning community. They worked with the individual school leaders to make school improvements, develop strategic initiatives, and provide support and resources as needed. The Area Superintendent and AED were also tasked with cultivating leadership within their learning community. They met regularly with Principals and Assistant Principals, both individually and as a group to collaborate and
challenge them to improve on leadership practices. In addition, these leaders had designed informal programs for aspiring assistant principals and principals, and worked with school leaders looking to move forward in their careers. The participants in these programs were identified as strong candidates for promotion to the principal or assistant principal position. The programs varied across the district but were catered to address the overall goals of the district as well as the needs of the leaders within each learning community. Book studies, mentorships, guest speakers, collaborative planning, practice interviews, and goal setting were examples of some topics that were contained within the leadership programs.

In searching for participants for this study, the AED’s were asked to provide input to create a list of possible participants. A meeting was held with the AED’s of the four learning communities. The research proposal was presented and discussed. Each AED submitted names of assistant principals that they identified as participants for the study. For the purposes of this research only the aspiring principal program participants were considered. Additionally, the AED provided a list of current principals who would be best suited for the research. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for assistant principals are listed below.

**Inclusion criteria:**

- Aspirations to become a principal.
- Minimum of one year in their current position.
- Positive outlook on experience as an assistant principal.

**Exclusion criteria:**

- Assistant principal who has failed to make it into the principal pool after two attempts.
- Negative outlook on experience as an assistant principal
Feedback from the AED was critical to identifying assistant principals that met the inclusion criteria. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for principals was left to the discretion of the AED who work closely with all the principals in their learning community.

An initial email was sent to possible assistant principals and principals identifying their willingness to participate (see Appendix C). The email contained information about the study’s purpose, design, and interview process. Details regarding confidentiality and trustworthiness were also included. Assistant principals and principals willing to participate responded with their preferred method of interviewing and date and time. Options for interviewing included: face to face, Skype/Google Hangout/FaceTime, or over the phone. After the interview is completed, all participants received a note of appreciation for their time and input.

The researcher also conducted two mini-cases (see Figure 4) as well. The current research design omitted elementary assistant principals and principals. Elementary assistant principals and principals were removed from the design because their position in the school was different than that of secondary assistant principals and principals. However, Mini-Case #1 involved an elementary school provided further insight and perspectives into positions of the assistant principal and principal. Stake (1995) defined mini-cases as particular aspects of special importance that helped the understanding of the complexity of the case study. A participant who was a new elementary school principal was the subject for this mini-case. This participant provided the perspective of both positions and for the process within the district for promotion. This was useful to the context of the study. Additionally, Mini-Case #2 was conducted on the researcher. The researcher’s own perspective, having held a district position working directly with school leadership, and who then served as an assistant principal, allowed for a more detailed viewpoint on the positions and preparation.
Data Collection

The researcher collected data primarily through interviews; however, field notes and observations are listed in the findings. The field notes gathered by the researcher during the actual school visits and interviews was not created for research purposes. It is presented only as a strategy to minimize bias from the researcher. Bias from the researcher may exist as the researcher currently serves in a secondary assistant principal position. The researcher interviewed Secondary Assistant Principals and Principals. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, they selected their preferred method of interviewing. Given the size of the system and travel considerations, the researcher provided flexibility in interview contact methods. Participants chose from the options of: face to face, Skype/Google Hangout/FaceTime, or phone interviews. Participants provided their preferred dates and times. Based upon mutual availability, the researcher scheduled the interviews. At the start of the interview, participants received information regarding the process, intended goals of the research, and confidentiality details. If participants choose not to respond or participate, they were eliminated from the research pool. If numbers of willing participants does not meet the preferred research target, additional support was requested from the system for participants, unless the amount is no longer necessary. The preferred research target is ten secondary assistant principals and seven secondary principals within the system.

The protocol for the interview is rooted in phenomenology and the researcher asked one question, and the interview progressed based on responses. The phenomenological question asked to Principals was “Do you feel/believe that your position as an assistant principal was a pathway to the principalship?” The question asked to Assistant Principals was, “Describe your
current positions as it relates to preparation for the principalship.” The interview is designed to take 30 -45 minutes

**Trustworthiness**

Guba (1981) provides four criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in a research study. Strategies used in this study to assure credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability mirror this criteria and are as follows:

- **Credibility** – is the assurance of truth in the findings. This study ensured credibility by providing for prolonged engagement, meaning the researcher spent sufficient time in the field to build trust and become truly oriented in the situation. The researcher in this study is a part of this field so there is a level of rapport and trust already established. Triangulation, of multiple data sources and data gathering methods, was used to deepen credibility. Interviews along with field notes and observations were considered in the dissemination of data. Finally, negative case analysis, or searching for data that contradicts the patterns in research was used. The researcher sought and analyzed data points that may differ from others.

- **Dependability** (in preference to reliability) – is the ability for the results to be reproduced. Conducting an external inquiry audit provided support for the dependability of the results. The researcher sought out other researchers to analyze the process and results of the study to ensure dependability. Five researchers sat on the dissertation committee for this research and can complete an external inquiry audit.

- **Transferability** (in preference to external validity/generalizability) – is the ability for the results of the study to be used in other contexts. Transferability was achieved by creating a thick description of the field experiences. A thick description, as opposed to a thin
description, took all parts of the context into the research by creating a detailed account of the field experience.

- Confirmability (in preference to objectivity) – is the ability to remove bias from the researcher and show neutrality throughout the study. Allowing for an external audit provided verification that bias has been removed from the research. Additionally, an audit trail was listed by the researcher. The audit trail described in detail the research process throughout the study.

More specifics regarding the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004) that was used by the researcher are listed in detail (See Table 2).
Table 2

Strategies to Assure Trustworthiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assurances</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Credibility | • Regardless of how the participants interview, consistency was provided in the method – the same question was asked in the same manner.  
• Inform assistant principals and principals about confidentiality of their information and protect identity – each participant was given a number to identify them  
• Create a thick description – of the phenomenon in the position of the assistant principal being a pathway to the principalship.  
• Using the details gathered from the interviews appropriately form theories about the position of the assistant principal  
• Familiarity with the system and leaders within it builds credibility with participants.  
• Spent an adequate amount of time before interview begins to ensure trust.  
• Using different leaders from a variety of schools and experience to create an array of feedback and a better overall picture |
| Transferability | • Diverse participants provided transferability among other schools and systems.  
• Created a thick description of the implications of research to relate the findings of the position of the assistant principal. |
| Dependability | • Provided a detailed description of the methodology so that it can be recreated with another system.  
• Allowed for an extensive review of the work so that it can be determined that the process and product were accurate.  
• Created Case Study graphic |
| Confirmability | • Removed as much bias as possible when talking to school leaders  
• Made bias known in interview and data coding.  
• Made bias known in triangulating the data between the interviews and surveys.  
• Identified any ethical issues or concerns with methodology.  
• Identified and address limitations of the study.  
• Showed diagrams for data reduction. |

I completed bracketing (Creswell, 2013) to remove any researcher bias prior to analysis.

Phenomenological researchers hold that it is not possible to completely remove personal perspectives while conducting this type of research. The basis of phenomenology is “to
understand the phenomena in their own terms – to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p.96). In order to ensure trustworthiness, the researcher must address his/her personal experience and remove it from the interview process as bracketing (Hammersley, 2000). As the researcher, I acknowledged my personal experience and preconceptions within this research. I am an assistant principal within this system. My goals include promotion to the principalship. As an educator in this system, I have had various leadership roles both at the school and district level. My viewpoint and understanding of both the assistant principal and principal positions is rich, as I have been able to see different leadership styles while working with leaders across the system. In order to conduct this research without bias, I included myself as one of the mini-cases within the study. Participating as a mini-case allowed me to acknowledge my experience and bracket it from interviews with the other participants. Additionally, the interview questions were “directed to the participant’s experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about the theme in question” (Welman & Krugar, 1999, p.196) and free from my personal opinion or influence. I took careful measures during the interviews to remove my own meaning and interpretation to enter the world of my participants during our interview (Creswell, 2013). I responded to their own experience and structured the interview differently based on the unique responses of each participant. My interviews, therefore, varied in length and number and type of questions.

Data Analysis

This study involved interviewing principals and assistant principals. I audio taped and saved the interviews then transcribed them using Rev.com, a reputable and confidential transcription service and converted into a text-based document for coding. I used Atlas.ti (QUARC Consulting, 2011) to analyze the data. Atlas.ti is a qualitative research database that
aids in coding qualitative research appropriately for triangulation and dissemination. I used this program to input interview results for evaluation.

Coding the interviews was based on the areas of analysis: evaluation, preparation, role and responsibilities, and instructional leadership. These topics were separated to address the complexity of the issues driving the case. I used open coding to distinguish categories and concepts of the participants. Associations between the responses provided correlations and data for the research.

Creswell, as cited in Moustakas (1994), suggests a method for phenomenological data analysis. The six steps are structured and outline the actions needed in developing themes during analysis of the research data. First, bracketing, or a description of the researcher’s personal experience, is written to allow for the focus to be on the respondents’ lived experiences. Next, I compiled a list of significant statements. This is known as the horizontalization of the data. Horizontalization requires the researcher to give each statement equal emphasis and worth. Once the significant statements were compiled, they were grouped together into “meaningful units” or themes. Then, I wrote a detailed account of what the respondents experienced within the phenomenon as a textural description. After I wrote the textural description, I included an account of how the experience happened; this is known as the structural description. Finally, I composed a composite description of the phenomenon is to provide the “what” and “how” regarding the phenomenon from the respondents. The textural, structural, and composite descriptions are organized by themes and sub themes throughout this chapter.

The four themes that emerged during the analysis of this research were evaluation, instructional leadership, preparation, and role/responsibilities. While coding the data within these four themes, subthemes appeared across respondents. Within the evaluation theme, the
subthemes of the interview process for the principalship and the LKES evaluation tool were present. The preparation theme revealed four additional subthemes of college/university preparation, principal support, roles of an assistant principal, and suggestions on how to prepare assistant principals for the principalship. The mini cases were also aligned using these themes and subthemes. The network view of the codes and subcodes provided a visual representation of the associations within the themes of the research (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Network View of Coded Research

Limitations and Delimitations

The study design created an opportunity to investigate the experiences that assistant principals and principals share in their leadership path. This type of qualitative inquiry provided rich descriptions of leadership and the pathway to becoming a principal. However, the methodological design was complex and required more time and effort to be fully developed.
(Creswell, 2013). This phenomenological case study examined the experiences of a small number of participants. Creswell (2013) described qualitative research as a focus on experiences of a small group of participants that transferable to a larger population involved in the same phenomena. It would be difficult to make broad inferences in all findings of this research, but generalization with topics is possible. I aim to tell their story and share their experiences as they have lived them and through their voice.

An additional limitation included the participant selection. I was dependent on the recommendations of the community leadership within the system. The leadership had the most developed knowledge of the assistant principals’ and principals’ experiences and were versed in my research. Selection of the participants needed to be carefully produced, as it could impact the findings. As discussed in previous sections of this paper, some assistant principals did not desire to become principals, and some principals were never assistant principals.

The current state of the system presented another limitation. At the time the research was conducted, the system was in search of a new superintendent. District and building leadership were in flux. This created some difficulty in securing recommendations from AED’s as well as a noted concern in some interviews. Additionally, the system’s leadership selection process presents a limitation on the experience for respondents.

My reputation and relationships with the participants had an impact on the participant interviews. Having served as a member of the district leadership team, I knew all participants prior to interviewing them and many had worked with me directly. For the few that I did not know as well, it was critical to build that trust prior to starting the interview. Finding connections, commonalities, and ensuring anonymity with their responses was critical for me.
Additionally, in order to keep my credibility as a researcher, I remained focused on their responses and did not interject my own experiences into the conversation.

The semi-structured design of my interview also presented a limitation. I used the responses from each individual and their experience to construct further questions. For this reason, my interviews with each participant varied in length and detail. Participants often shared similar experiences, but were concerned about different topics of preparation for the principalship.

Summary

This phenomenological case study addressed one main research question related to the intellectual goals of the study: Does the assistant principal position prepare candidates for the principalship? Additional questions to be explored relate directly with the practical goals of the case study: a) To what extent do assistant principals view their position as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school system in the southeast? b) To what extent do principals view the position of the assistant principal as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school system in the southeast?

I used the qualitative approach was to provide further depth in analysis. A phenomenological case study provided two benefits in possible findings. The phenomenological approach addressed a specific phenomenon or situation to research, in this case, the pathway from assistant principal to principal. The use of a case study allowed the research to be more focused, but sought to influence a larger group. The constructivist approach in design allowed me to develop correlations based on current realities and experiences.
The participants were selected from a large metropolitan school district in the southeast which represented a diverse groups of schools and leaders. This diverse system provided transferability of findings across a larger population.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

It was the first day of school. No matter how many years have gone by, the same jitters always appear. This time, she was back in the student seat. Graduate school. It was time and she was ready. Under the guidance and suggestion of leaders in her building, this was her next step in becoming an education leader. She felt confident in her experiences and had mentored, led, and managed teachers within her building.

The next six semesters were filled with theory of practice and law, performance based opportunities, and leadership experiences. She collaborated with other colleagues in graduate school, who like her, were learning about leadership and developing their leadership philosophies.

After graduation, she received her diploma and state certification as an educational leader. She began pursuing her next leadership venue. She interviewed, and shortly after, became an assistant principal. This was the first step, she knew, in becoming a principal. She vowed to learn as much as she could in this preparatory role to position herself to be the most successful principal. It was clear, early on, that what she had learned in graduate school was very different from the expectations and responsibilities of the assistant principal role. Her philosophies about instructional leadership, coaching, leading change, and school culture felt hidden underneath the piles of paperwork. The new duties she was assigned included managerial tasks such as book distribution, student scheduling, discipline, teacher management, parent complaints, teacher evaluation, and building safety. At times it felt disconnected, but this was the job required for the
Principalship. She attended meetings with other assistant principals and realized that while they shared the same titles, their roles and responsibilities were vastly different.

Every principal supported his/her assistant principals differently. Each was encouraged to build talent and grow leaders, but the consistency and fidelity varied throughout the system. She believed she was getting the right support from her principal and found ways to get exposure to new leadership opportunities and experiences. Her principal was positive and encouraging about her future, and she received evaluations that indicated she was successful in her role.

Five years into her role as an assistant principal, she began exploring the opportunity of taking that next step. With the support of her principal and other various system leaders, she entered the principal interview process and was selected for a school. This was it. Her goal of becoming a principal had become a reality. Excitement, anxiety, and even fear began to rise within her.

She reflected on her fear. Confused, she thought about what she was most afraid of. The truth was – was she really prepared? Was she ready? According to the expected pathway of school leaders, she had checked all the boxes and fulfilled all of the requirements, but was it enough? She was unsure about her previous roles in school leadership and her time spent as an assistant principal as preparation. Could she be a principal? Over her 13 year career in education, she had worked with a variety of leaders and had experiences that made her confident in her abilities. Until now. She made a list of goals for her first year. She would start with relationships. As with any new position, she would need support from those around her. Her last principal said to her to always remember to keep a broad view of each situation and the school as a whole. “Think of the big picture,” he told her.
She parked her car in the spot labeled with her new title and headed in. She was a lifelong student. Her comfort was within the school building. It was the first day of school, and while her face had aged and the scenery had changed, the constant that remained was the jitters. At 22, she never imagined she would be here. The teachers and students began to arrive. It was her chance and her school now. She closed her eyes and remembered her philosophies on learning and leading. She had to be ready. The bell rang. It is time to shine. Only time would tell.

The preceding vignette set the stage for the findings in this study. This study explored the position of the assistant principal in preparation for the principalship. A lack of research in this area compelled me to begin investigating this area of leadership. As shown in Chapter 2, the literature regarding the assistant principal was scarce and spanned several decades. Previous research highlighted the differences in the assistant principal role, preparation, and preparedness for the principalship. Bloom and Krovetz (2001) noted that the tasks assigned to the assistant principal failed to prepare them for duties in budget and curriculum needed for the principalship, but focused on discipline and student activities. Madden (2008) believed that “recent research indicated that the assistant principal position does not provide the appropriate training or preparation for assistant principals to become principals” (p.3). Studying the assistant principal role and analyzing its complexity and diverse nature revealed its importance and provided context for further work and structure. This study followed an interpretive approach to research particularized in a phenomenological case study. The case study design provided the bounded system and clear steps for the research. The lived experiences of each respondent were captured in the study and provided insight and suggestions into the leadership pathway within a school district. As noted in Chapters 1 and 3, the questions addressed in this research were:

The main research question related to the intellectual goals of the study;
1) Does the assistant principal position prepare candidates for the principalship?

Additional questions explored relate directly to the practical goals driving the case study:

a) To what extent do assistant principals view their position as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?

b) To what extent do principals view the position of the assistant principal as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?

Chapter Four presents the results from the research gathered through interviews. A total of fifteen school leaders were interviewed within a large metropolitan school system in the southeast. The interview protocol provided demographic data (Appendix D) and descriptions of the current reality in the pathway to the principalship. All participants signed a consent form prior to being interviewed (Appendix E) agreeing to participate in the studying and acknowledging the responsibility of the interviewer. Analysis of the interviews through Atlas.ti allowed me to identify patterns within the responses. These patterns were then clustered together using phenomenological reduction, and themes began to emerge. Four themes were present through the first several analysis of the interviews. Continued review of the interviews showed that within each theme, additional sub themes were present. The chapter was divided into sections based on the themes, and the results were analyzed according to the themes.

Summary of Participants

Results for my case study were gathered during fourteen interviews. As described in Chapter 3, selection of candidates was based on criterion and the suggestion of the district leadership. Assistant principals included in the study must have had aspirations to become a principal, a minimum of one year in their current position, and a positive outlook on experiences as an assistant principal. Area Executive Directors (AED) from the district’s learning
communities provided a list of candidates that met the criteria. Suggestions for principal participants came at the discretion of AED’s. Initially, the target number was ten assistant principals and seven principals. I conducted fourteen interviews, which was less than the proposed number. This was caused in part by the initial number of participants who agreed to interview and also by the saturation of information. Saturation of information occurs when the research shows that the sample size does not contribute to new information. Creswell (2011) stated that in relation to sample size within qualitative research it is typical “to study a few individuals or a few cases” (pg. 209). In this case study, after the thirteenth interview of secondary school leaders, the findings of the research had been established as no new information was being introduced.

The interview protocol began with demographic information that provided context for the respondents within the case study. Respondents included eight females and six males ranging from ages 25-54. Table 3 illustrates some of the demographic information retrieved during the first part of the interview. The majority of the participants were between the ages of 35-44 and had been at their current position one to three years. Demographically, the schools within this research represented a diverse subset. The assistant principals and principals, as well as the schools in which they work, vary in socio-economics, race, and academic achievement. Eight participants were from the north learning communities and six were from the central and south learning communities. All but one of the assistant principals and principals spent their entire career at the secondary level. Their current level may have differed from that of their past, but all of their work had been done at the secondary level. The only exception was one respondent who was currently in secondary, but who had previously been in elementary. Additionally, in the first mini case study on the elementary principal, that principal had only been at the elementary level.
Additional demographic information detailed in this part of the interview was addressed in the findings section as it pertained to support from the district, school personnel, and formal preparation for leadership. Data extracted from the entire demographic portion of the interview can be found in Appendix F.
Table 3

Demographic Information

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Emerging Themes

Four distinct themes emerged during the interviews. Within those four themes, subthemes also appeared and helped to further divide and disaggregate the findings. **Theme one centered on evaluation.** This theme encompassed the state’s evaluation tool or Leader Key Effectiveness System (LKES) as well as the interview process within the district. LKES was directly addressed in some interviews and in others came about during conversation about roles and characteristics of the work. The principal selection process was discussed often, particularly with the assistant principals, as a result of informal evaluation. Almost all of the respondents noted that a leader in the district or their own school (their principal) sought them out to continue through the leadership process as a result of the success in their current work.

**Theme two was centered on instructional leadership.** This particular theme was not subdivided into smaller themes, but instead addressed a unique piece of school leadership. Each respondent had a different perspective on instructional leadership, but all noted the roles of both the assistant principal and principal as being critical in this part. **Theme three was the largest and focused on preparation.** Throughout the interviews, it was evident that the respondents felt that preparation was multi-faceted and complex. The subthemes under preparation were formal preparation at the university or collegiate level and within the district, principal support, roles/tasks assumed as the assistant principal, and suggestions for preparing future principals.

**Theme four was based on the roles and responsibility differences between the assistant principal and the principal** both perceived and known. It was an important part of the interview for many of the respondents, as they showed emotion when describing the similarities and differences in each role. The following describes the findings in each theme and sub theme.
Findings by Theme

Theme One: Evaluation

This theme included two distinct subthemes. The interview process for principals and the state evaluation tool were both discussed in relation to evaluation. The subthemes of the state evaluation tool was not addressed by every respondent, but nearly all of them discussed the principal interview process.

Principal Interview Process

The interview process and selection of principals was an interesting part of the interviews. The principals responded with mostly positive commentary about the process and how they arrived at their current role. The assistant principals were very different in their shared experiences in principal selection. They were not overly negative, but expressed concern about the process and identification of candidates for the principalship. While the particulars within this district may have varied from other districts, the concerns from each school leader was valid.

The principals who commented on this subtheme had recently gone through the principal interview process, and so their experience was fresh in their minds. They all described a leader that encouraged them to pursue the principalship and supported them entering the selection process. One principal described how it felt as the process began:

Dealing with the stress of it. Knowing that this is my make or break. I'm sticking my neck out. Holy crap, am I good enough? Am I not good enough? Preparing for all that. I treated it like a final exam. I spent days in here by myself in a conference room preparing, and laying all the stuff out. All my experiences. All my stories that I had to tell. If they ask this question ... I had 36 stories to tell.
The principal went on to say that “I'll phrase it this way. Having gone through that principal pool process, and maybe I made it harder on myself, but putting myself through that process was harder than it's been being a principal.” Three principals commented similarly to say that it required a dedicated amount of studying time to prepare for the interview. Each though mentioned that afterward, in becoming a principal, they felt validated for the work they had done and for those that had supported them.

As the principals described not only the process they experienced, but also their responsibility to the assistant principals or other leaders they work with in preparing them for the next step, they became incredibly reflective, pausing at times to think about what they were doing. One principal talked about the conversations that happen between principals at meetings regarding supporting their assistant principals. One noted:

We don't have any formal or informal conversations about what to do, but we do talk about our people and that we have ... [mentioned person] is on my staff. [They are] going to be good. [They are] coming to this next meeting, so I want [them] to start seeing things this way. We share names more than we share what we're doing for them.

This principal described a process of collaborating with others about the ownership principals have in mentoring their assistant principals.

Another principal mentioned that within the learning community, the area superintendent charged the principals with acknowledging the “superstars” in their building. This principal described this conversation:

Make sure that your superstars know that they're superstars and why they're superstars. That doesn't have anything to do with growing principals or growing APs; it's just making sure that your strongest people know that you think they're your strongest people.
Complimenting people and making sure that they know that you appreciate them and you don't want them to leave, and all this kind of stuff.

The assistant principals that described their thoughts and experiences with the process and selection of principals were emotional in their words and body language. Many had had similar experiences or feelings, but they were expressed differently. The expectations and support of assistant principals to become principals was the most common topic. One assistant principal described a perspective of the process as a whole:

What is expected during the whole interview process? A lot of people are, in my mind, qualified, but don't make it to that next step. Just to say, "We want to grow the leaders who are sitting in our district right now and let's make it easy for you guys, because you've dedicated, you've given the time, you've given the service, let us help you get there." A lot of people feel that there's this roadblock. You put in all these years of service as an assistant principal and then you can't make it over that hump.

The expectations of not only the process, but of the experiences that an assistant principal has during his or her tenure, was also of concern to them. The assistant principals agreed that their role and support across the district varied, and so it was unknown to them how the district leaders were picking candidates. An assistant principal stated:

I think that the district needs to first have some clear district standards of what they're looking for in a principal. I know you have those leadership essentials, but to me the leadership essentials (create value, lead by example, embrace change, develop others) are so broad that it goes really with you value your customers, but those go hand in hand with people who are. AP’s are prepared professionals, I don't think the district has defined what a principal role looks like for them beyond just the job description. I think some
standards, like on the job professional development, whether it's mandatory or whether it's optional. It can be during the school day or it can be something we take part of after the school hours because we want to better ourselves and become a principal, but I don't think there's any prep.

Participants often commented similarly about the interview process and overall selection. Assistant principals believed the process to be highly subjective. Three described the body language of the interviewers being intentionally negative or “stagnant.” Four also described, without true negativity, how some assistant principals made it into the principal selection pool while others did not. One commented, regarding the interview questions and responses, “so does that mean they tell a great story? If all I'm doing is telling a great story and that'll get me into the pool and then get me a school, okay, I just need to go to some improv class and learn how to act and get ready for this.”

Four assistant principals felt that the work they were doing was going unnoticed, and without support from leaders outside of their building would make it difficult to participate in or be prepared for the principal interview process. One indicated:

Sometimes I don't feel that the work I do is noticed or valued. I need feedback from AED. I don't just need feedback from my principal. [They] do not need to be the only person that evaluates me. Just like our teachers get evaluated by several of us, I feel like I need to be evaluated by more than just one lens that one set of eyes.

Three assistant principals mentioned similarly that after their own interview process, they valued the feedback to improve or prepare better, but were never given that by anyone at the district level. Each assistant principal noted how they valued feedback as necessary and critical in their development and preparation for the principalship. One described that assistant principals are
feeling “defeated” overall by the lack of understanding and feedback around the selection process. Another remarked that “a lot of people just give up on it, who say ‘forget it’” because there is a lack of consistency and understanding.

Two assistant principals mentioned conversations they had had with district leadership about the length of time they were going to be in the assistant principal role before becoming a principal. One in particular described a recent conversation about this by saying:

We want you to move up and be a principal within 2 to 3 years. If you can't do that, you’re not made to be a principal. I would say in what I know goes on in other buildings ….. I would say nobody here is prepared to be a principal because we are never given the opportunity to know what that is. We're never given the opportunity to step outside of what we do and make an instructional leadership decision. Everything is wait. Everything is I'm not ready for that yet or we're not ready for that yet.

An interesting comment that brought tears to the eyes of the assistant principal in describing this part of the role was:

You're sitting at an AP meeting and people are frustrated and upset, that we were all good, great, awesome teachers. That's why we were sought for these positions. I would imagine everybody's story mirrors the same. Their why, their reason starts with, somebody sought me out and said you've got to do this job and you'd be great at blah blah blah. Then you end up here and it seems like that stop gap and you feel like you're affecting change, but then you're not.

Five assistant principals described the suggestion from district leaders and their own principals as the “30,000 foot view,” meaning that every conversation and piece of their interview and preparation should be about looking at things from a visionary level. Three
assistant principals said that this is difficult because they do not have that opportunity day-to-day. One explained the feedback that was given after the interview and how this idea was contradictory. This assistant principal stated:

When I think of the questions and I remember my answers very clearly, those answers that I gave answered those questions. To me, those questions didn't necessarily make you jump all the way up to a 30000 foot view because if you're asking a question, talk about a time you led a diversity conversation in your building, to me that's not a 30000 foot view. Especially given my role and involvement in what I have been doing.

Another theme that emerged was about assistant principals who do not necessarily want to become principals, but who would like to try additional leadership roles within the district. Another assistant principal noted that:

People who are sitting in this role, I think need options. If you don't want to go the principalship route, you don't want to leave the district, you value the district, you want to be a part of the district, opportunities need to be created where you can move up, you can advance. Not, ‘Okay, if I transfer to a district position, then that's considered a demotion.’ That is what happens, in some cases.

Suggestions assistant principals had for district leaders to better prepare them for the interview process were for leaders to coach them in resume building, interviewing details, telling “their story,” and experiences they should be engaging in in their daily work to build their knowledge.

**LKES Evaluation Tool**

The LKES evaluation tool was addressed as a piece of the evaluation theme within the interviews. No respondent was overly positive in their comments about the evaluation tool. The perspective of its use and importance varied based on the role the respondent had – principal or
assistant principal. All respondents mentioned that the LKES tool was used for all school leaders, but admitted the differences in the role of the assistant principal and principal. One said, “I think that we are being evaluated on the same thing, but when you start looking at some of the indicators, you'll see as an AP that maybe you didn't always get opportunities to do some of those things.” The areas principals claimed assistant principals needed opportunities in were Human Resources, Operational Management, and Instructional Leadership.

The principals commented that they used the LKES tool in evaluating their assistant principals, but did not comment about how the LKES tool was used in their own evaluations as principal. Principals were positive about the tool, mentioning in two cases that “it is a good start.” One principal commented, “I think that the tool itself has strengths, but similar to TKES (Teacher Keys Evaluation System), but as an evaluator using TKES, I feel like you can use the evaluation tool to grow people and to make a difference.” This person suggested that when it comes to the evaluation of assistant principals, “more often than not, it's the coaching, the really kind of taking them under your wing, building them up, that same kind of mentorship thing.”

This principal also admitted:

I honestly think that there are assistant principals that might be pigeon holed in certain roles and probably get fine evaluations on LKES or even if they don't I'm not sure that one little thing, or if you got a level two or even a level one, that, that would be the thing to make an assistant principal realize, ‘Oh, I need to do X.’

This vantage point puts the emphasis on using the tool to drive the coaching and leading of an assistant principal rather than just being a mere tool for evaluation. Rather than “trying to fill up a box” and make the checkmark of completion, principals would need to use this tool to build and guide their assistant principals.
One principal suggested to their assistant principals to “create a folder for each of the eight standards” and over the course of the year, add items to these folders that exemplified the work they did around this topic. This way the assistant principals would have a better idea of the work they did in certain areas and in areas they needed growth. This principal stated that “if you start with those LKES standards. It would give you an idea and you'll be able to say, ‘Well all I do is number eight.’” This approach requires the assistant principals to further evaluate their roles and seek the guidance and coaching needed for growth. This method would allow the principal and assistant principal to have conversations about what experiences the assistant principal needed to prepare better for the principalship.

Another principal mentioned the disconnect in the evaluation system by stating, “I know that the evaluation system is the same for assistant principal or principals even though they don't take on the same roles.” At the same time this principal felt that “healthy, respectful feedback is always helpful” and that regardless of the differences in roles, the tool is helpful. This person continued to suggest that assistant principals could be required to use the tool differently by being “evaluated on certain standards and as [they] progress maybe work on some other ones rather than having all eight every year…. then once you can be proficient or higher in those then [they’re] on [their] way to being ready for the next role.”

Assistant principals had a different opinion of the LKES evaluation system than the principals. When describing this system of evaluation, each that commented had a change in body language and tone. To these respondents, the LKES tool was an evaluation measure, but felt that is was an ineffective tool in evaluating their roles or was not being used with fidelity across schools and districts. One assistant principal described it as a “bunch of mess” similar to the teacher evaluation system. Each assistant principal mentioned the difference in the roles and
responsibilities of their position at schools across the district and state. Their concerns centered on the eight standards and questioned if one or more of the standards were “not part of [their] role.” An example of this was described by an assistant principal who said:

If I'm not in a community that receives school or values education the way that some other communities do, I'm not going to do well in that area. If I'm in a school where the culture is poor for reasons beyond my control, then how am I held to a standard above what I can possibly really do with culture in a school.

This suggested, that in certain areas, this assistant principal had little experience in required or needed roles, as the principal was the one actually responsible for them.

One assistant principal was highly passionate about an experience with the LKES tool. This assistant principal was emotional during this part of the interview and noted:

When you walk in to ... If you say nobody's given you a lead or anything, you walk in to your end of the year conference for your evaluation and do you feel that you've been given against the eight LKES standards do you feel like you've been given a fair shot?

The person continued:

At the end of the year, my conference was maybe 3 minutes. It was after he had shared it with me at midnight the night before because the deadline was at midnight the night before. While I think I do a good job at what I do, and so I'm happy with my threes or whatever, I don't think those threes mean anything. Other than [the principal] saying, "Great job. You did a good job this year. You survived it."

Overall, the experiences with the LKES tool varied between assistant principal and principal. How the principal viewed the use of the tool and how the assistant principal valued his or her evaluation appear to be in question. Certain tasks given to the assistant principal did not
fall into the standards of the LKES tool. In referencing the literature and theoretical framework of this study, which is based in role theory, Mertz (2000) claims “the role one holds in an organizational social system carries with it powerful norms and behavioral expectations” and the “observable behavior of individuals holding a position is a function of the organizationally defined positions and expectations” (p.5). This section illuminates the concept of role theory. The position of the assistant principal and principal are defined by expectations set forth by the state’s evaluation tool, yet the duties and responsibilities of both positions are different and created confusion and frustration. This tool was valued mostly as a coaching instrument, but not used in that purpose in many cases. This jeopardized the validity of the tool in terms of being a valid evaluation of the assistant principal.

**Theme Two: Instructional Leadership**

The instructional leadership topic was loosely discussed in nine of the interviews. From the perspectives of both the assistant principal and principal the role of the instructional leader is framed by the principal and supported by assistant principal and other staff members. One principal described the role of instructional leadership:

I'll tell you right now that the role in instructional leadership is huge. I do feel like my job as principal is to again, have that kind of 30,000 foot view of what is it that we're focusing on, what instructional strategies are we really needing to dig into? That's my job and so at the end of the day instructional leadership really is me, but I'll be honest, if my AP's are tied up in the office doing discipline and aren't able to get out in the classrooms to again, do what we've been talking about, take people under their wing, do some coaching, give some guidance or if nothing else, hold people accountable.
This principal was passionate about instructional leadership and its presence in schools and how it pertained to the roles of school leaders. The principal stated honestly that:

In some ways it sort of like a back handed compliment when you get the AP job and that is we trust you to be an instructional leader, you have the capacity to do so, we really think that you can help coach up people, make a difference in the teaching quality at this school and oh, by the way, can you process all the discipline? Can you run these couple of programs in the beginning of the year that honestly have nothing to do with instruction? It's like a backhanded compliment.

Another principal stated that the instructional leadership should be distributed meaning that the principal is the ultimate instructional leader but that it should be shared with others in the building – “for two people, a principal and an AP, to be the instructional leaders. You've got to have more.” This principal described the current instructional leadership framework:

My whole administrative staff should feel confident in instruction, not curriculum, they need to be familiar, they need to be in those classrooms, so that they can see and be responsible. It's not just the principal I don't call my teachers department chairs, they are instructional leaders. I try to choose teacher who sit on the instructional leadership team, who model what we're looking for as this is a great teacher. You're going to see them when you go into their classrooms doing all these great wonderful things…. Everyone is an instructional leader and that's important. It's not just me.

The assistant principals who described their involvement in instructional leadership were polar in their emotions and feelings. The difference was how each principal viewed instructional leadership – as a shared or delegated role. An assistant principal who worked for a principal that believed in a shared instructional leadership role explained:
The good thing about it, in this building, is that we can kind of hone in what we're interested in and then kind of focus on that. I'm over humanities, so I get involved in the planning and trying to take that department to the next level. [I plan with the district personnel] to work together to kind of take our kids to the next level, so we definitely are able to get involved. The other assistant principal, he's involved in Project Based Learning and trying to get that up and running. We all kind of choose what we're interested in…. We try and tie everything back to instruction. Even if it doesn't seem to, on the surface, be related to instruction, we always show the connection.

Another assistant principal with a similar structure said “I think as far as the instructional leadership part, we're very strong as a team.” One assistant principal described the mindset of the current instructional leadership by noting “The instructional leaders in the building to me equally are the admin team, the teacher leaders, our content chairs, our content instructional leaders, our coaches. I think those people really lead the instructional focus of our school.”

A different assistant principal differentiated the roles of the principal and assistant principal in terms of instructional leadership and described “we are doing instructional rounds, we are doing TKES, we are doing those things when we can. I feel like our roles are very similar in that aspect, but I think the challenges that take up the time in the day that we'd rather not deal with are different.” Another assistant principal made a conscious effort this year to focus on instructional leadership and demanded that time and responsibility from the principal.

In an environment where the instructional leadership is delegated from the principal to the assistant principals and others, the experience and emotion was very different. An assistant principal in this environment suggested:
In this building I don't see anybody doing it. I think we have pockets of it. I think that we all try to do it within our context, but there's no clear direction as to what we even want. We have one to one technology and we haven't had one conversation as to what we want to see in classrooms with technology. Everything is vague..... There's no overall vision of what you want classrooms to look like in the school. I'm not talking about micro managing, I'm just saying in general, what do we want…. What are we doing here? I don't think anybody has the answer to that. I don't think anybody's stepping to say, ‘This is what we want.’

Similarly, a different assistant principal described the role of the assistant principal in making decisions and being at the “mercy” of the principal’s decisions. All assistant principals who responded in this area expressed interest in instructional leadership because they were once “great teachers” but noted that their role varied depending on what building they were in and what type of principal they worked for.

**Theme Three: Preparation**

This theme illustrates the different avenues of preparation of the assistant principal for the principalship. It addressed both formal and informal preparation measures. The initial question asked during the interview centered on preparation and thus this theme had the greatest amount of findings. One central theme developed surrounding this entire area, and is discussed later, but as the respondents discussed preparation they felt that the support they were given was by far the most influential piece to preparation. Four subthemes help to organize the thoughts of the respondents and illustrate the many facets of preparation for the principalship. These subthemes are – college/university/district preparation, principal support, assistant principal role, and suggestions for preparation.
College/University/District Preparation

Formal preparation for leadership is not separated into coursework for principals and assistant principals. Those who would like to fill either role obtain the same degree(s). All but one respondent attended a Georgia College or University for their leadership degree. This section is not organized by separating the thoughts of assistant principals and principals, rather it focused on leadership preparation versus role preparation.

In discussing coursework at the collegiate or university level, each respondent described a similar experience regardless of where they went to school. Each agreed that the coursework was heavily rooted in theory and strategy. This was helpful in developing an understanding of school based leadership, but all respondents agreed it did not prepare them for the work day-to-day. A principal expressed this by saying “what prepared me so well to be effective as an assistant principal came I would say from the research and the strategies…. but being able to handle crises very effectively and with a cool head, I would say that that came a lot from [specific school experience].”

The use of case studies and talking through different scenarios was a piece of the coursework that several respondents felt was critical. The most relevant coursework or experiences described in the interviews were:

- One principal noted: My masters programs were helpful, one in particular they brought in a lot principals throughout Metro Atlanta, representing different school districts. They would just kind of come in, the principals would. Just tell you about their experiences and how they run their schools. That was very helpful to me, because it was real person and it wasn't the theory part.
• An assistant principal stated: [In an EdS program] The professors geared all the classes towards people that had already had experience, and they geared all of our learning towards something that is directly applicable. In your building the next day type thing. Unlike in the masters [at a different university] where it was …. very abstract, it's very theory. It's case history. It's the law.

• Another principal commented: From the school perspective, the college experience, I think they gave me the theory behind it, a lot of the standards that I would be addressing as I became a leader in the building and it was more or less making sure I've either modeled or worked with an assistant principal just to see their work. I really didn't do the work; it was just the overarching part and seeing what the work looks like.

• Another assistant principal noted: Back then the program that we were in, it was just kind of making you think about the work in kind of a philosophical way, not in any kind of relevant, real-world way, I don't think.

• A third principal stated: Grad school was good at helping me to think outside of the box. I think as a teacher you're so in the room you don't see the bigger picture of a school. I think grad school helped me look at the bigger picture.

The respondents who attended a program that included the cohort model noted that it was helpful in building a network and sense of collaboration. It also broadened their knowledge of various levels and types of schools. Each respondent responded positively about their college/university experience as some of it was helpful but felt that it did not prepare them for the work they would do in their current role. An assistant principal noted “in all honesty I didn't really feel like that was a good of preparation because it's like the theory without the practice.” Performance based programs were mentioned by six of the respondents and had positive
responses, however the suggestion of an internship type experience would be more beneficial. A respondent claimed “….an internship like that with teachers… I don’t know why we don’t have to do it”.

The other piece to the formal preparation that was discussed was the programs designed by the district to prepare leaders to be principals and assistant principals. This topic received mixed emotions throughout the responses. Only two of the respondents had favorable comments around the programs designed by the district. One principal noted a previous program the district had many years ago that mirrored an internship. They explained “[it] was a yearlong program and you had to go to different schools throughout [district]. It can be very diverse from north to south and you were able to work at different levels….. The experience of being able to see the system from a more system wired perspective, was a great opportunity.” Another principal stated that the current learning community leader had designed a program to support those interested in moving forward with leadership. This program, the principal felt, was great preparation moving into the principal role. The principal said “[the] program for assistant principals was geared and focused toward taking that next step. We learned some good stuff there.” A different principal commented on a current initiative that the district created which is a summer internship for teachers to get experience at the district level and learn about different opportunities. This principal did not participate in this program but heard it was a great experience for those involved.

The majority of respondents did not see district programs as beneficial. Each noted that across the district the programs were very different and not differentiated to the needs or aspirations of the attendees. One type of program mentioned are geared toward supporting new
principals in their work. A principal recounts the meetings and if described the support and preparation:

You were in an all-day meeting, all day training, with other first year principals. It depended on the day. Whatever the content was. Some of it was, some of it wasn't. Some of it I happened to already know. Some of it I didn't. Much like any other training, professional development you've probably been to, some of it was a home run, some of it's not. Sometimes it's the presenter. Sometimes it's the material. Overall, give it a 6 or 7 out of 10.

In the district, new principals are also given a mentor for the first three years. Three of the principals who have/have had mentors explained that this piece helped provide support and preparation in the first few years.

Another type of program that created was for assistant principals and teachers who wanted to move into other leadership roles. Most programs met monthly and one program met weekly. These programs are described to be largely comprised of book studies, conversations, and case studies. While the respondents said the programs were helpful, many felt as though it was not equal across the district and some of the programs were more detailed and catered to needs of the assistant principals. One learning community reported having little or no targeted program for assistant principals to become principals.

A past program for assistant principals called the Promising Principals Program was mentioned by a principal. The principal noted that it was a “good experience” but that no guarantees were made for those participating in the program to move into a principalship and that caused frustration. Being open to anyone, not intentionally targeted to the assistant principals identified as being strong candidates and not differentiated were overall concerns with
these programs. This led to two very different ideas from assistant principal participants. The assistant principals that expressed interest in attending felt they would be given a position immediately going and, on the contrary, those that were seeking new positions felt “bored” or “uninterested”. One assistant principal participant explained “It's just not personalized, it's not those dives and digs like you might need.”

Suggestions for a program that would benefit assistant principals interested in moving into the principalship would be designed for all assistant principals across the district, not separated into the learning communities. In order to be successful, the program would be application based, incorporate job alike opportunities, and be differentiated for participants. Overall, the consensus among respondents was that current programs at the district and university level are not preparing assistant principals, or principals, for their current role. This was captured succinctly in a comment by one respondent who said “I don't think I received any preparation through grad school or any experience at the high school for what the reality of this job would be.”

**Principal Support**

The principals reflected on their experience leading up to their current role and agreed that the most influential piece to their success was the support from the principal. Every principal reported that their former principal created specific opportunities during their tenure as an assistant principal which gave them exposure and experience in areas critical to understanding the work of a principal. One principal described this directly by saying “some of the best preparation for me was from those principals.” Principals continued to describe memories of support given by their principal:
• I think some of the best preparation that I got was a principal who was willing to work with me and saw some potential in me and agreed to let me take on some leadership tasks. [the principal] called it then ... [the principal]’s term for it was bench warming. [the principal] gave me several opportunities to work on a committee for the local school advisory council, which was sort of kind of like a governance council light, but to do the strategic plan with one of the committees we had a whole facet of it.

• I got to shadow some of the AP’s at that school for a day, which a day in life of an AP changes every single day, you know that, but it was still helpful to me to kind of get to see what they experienced. To me that was some of the best preparation that I ever got and then I'll say kind of secondly a different experience was my former principal really did the same thing for me as an AP. [the principal] would say, ‘Where do you see yourself going,’ and would me to identify where I needed additional opportunities. I helped to do the strategic plan at my last school and [the principal] kind of said, ‘You can continue to do that, but you need to do something else. How many times do you need to do a strategic plan?’ I think that those kinds of combinations were some of the best kind of preparation I got.

• [the principal] had us so involved in everything and it wasn't us doing the work for [the principal] but it was ‘I'm going to involve you in this’ so that a lot of the stuff that principals do we were doing a long side of [the principal] and then at some point we were doing. Any school wide decision that had to be made [the principal] at least brought us to the table and she would share with us ‘Okay, if this is the decision that I want your input in to decide which direction we're going in.’ We clearly knew what the decision making was. It wasn't a situation where we came to the table we felt like ‘I don't know why I'm in
here.’ We needed to talk it out [the principal] respected each and every one of our opinions and our insight into stuff to the point where [the principal] would let us draft what we thought our duties and responsibilities should be, send it to [the principal] of course [the principal] would have the ultimate say in that and help us to see things from a different stand point and what would make sense for our school. In almost every aspect of it we were involved.

- Every time they come to meet with AP’s, if they’re having that specific conversation they will check in with us. If it's not that day but they check in with us just to pick our brains and see where is this person at. This is what I've observed, tell me what you've observed, this is what I think should happen.

- My favorite principal that I worked under who's retired now, she was about three years four years away from retirement. She was just like, ‘Hey I'm here, but you do this, you do this.’ [The principal] gave me a lot of responsibility as an assistant principal. To lend a helping hand, because [the principal] was like, ”You got to learn how to do this.” When I got this job, I was confident that I had enough experience to do the job. I think it's just because of my unique situation.

- [The principal] pushed me towards being a principal and [the principal] purposefully put me in positions and scenarios in which I had to act and think and follow through as if I was the principal. [The principal] very much said, ‘Here, tell me in three months. It’s your decision to make, and you're going to live with it.’

- The principal when I was assistant principal including me in all facets of the job. [The principal] had been served as principal for so many years that systems were in place that
allowed for me to take part in principal type roles. From going to ad staff meetings with [the principal] to participating in the budget presentation to the area superintendent.

Knowing the importance the principal served in preparing them for their current role, the principals acknowledged the their own responsibility in building current assistant principals. One principal said “having your AP's privy to that information. Even if it's not directly affecting them, just like … but just saying this, this, and this happened I know you probably weren't a part of it you need to know about it because these are the things that can happen at a school.” Another principal disclosed “I think relationships are really important, that relationship between the principal and the AP's is very, very critical.”

Two principals admitted that delegating responsibility is required to provide meaningful and relevant experiences for assistant principals. A principal confessed:

You have to be as a leader able to give up some of that power and trust someone else to be able to do it and be there. You just don't give it to them and run away, because I had personals that did that, ‘Hey that's your bye.’ I do sit with them, because I'm trying to coach them and I'm coaching them and saying, ‘Okay what could you have done differently or that was really great. I like that way you did x, y, z and how you introduced it.’

Coaching is another responsibility that each of the principal talked directly about or eluded to. When asked directly about how they grow their assistant principals and what supports they have to do so one principal stated “I understand that I need to develop my people and make them stronger and better and whatever, and I do, but am I doing it the right way?” Another principal expanded on this idea but added:
None of mine are in the principal pool, but once you go through it, you're supposed to be defined, or characterized, or something, but they kind of say what your strengths are. Are the areas of growth, are those shared with principals, and do we know how to fill in those areas of growth, or should we? Should it be more a county experience where gaps get filled in?

This points to a lack of consistency between do principals understand how to prepare their assistant principals and what supports they are given to do so.

Two principals felt that the assistant principal position was enough to gain experience to become “a successful principal”. One principal described a perspective on the assistant principalship by saying “I used to volunteer to do a lot of things, because I wanted to learn. Sometimes it depends on the relationships you have with your principals. Sometimes they're receptive to that and sometimes they're not. It's an odd position to be as a AP.”

Assistant principals, however, provided a different view of this support. Those that felt that they were being effectively coached and supported by their principals found value in their relationships and role as an assistant principal. Those that did not noted they were unsupported felt devalued and on a path to the “unknown”. Exposure to experiences is what each assistant principal agreed was key to preparing for the principalship. An assistant principal commented:

Again, I think it depends on the building and I certainly think that depends on the leadership of the principal and the leadership style of the principal. I've been fortunate that, with both principals who have served here, that's just their philosophy, to grow not just the assistant principals, but the staff. Not even just they're open to it, that's almost the expectation.
Several assistant principals explained in detail the time current principals spend with them, to coach and grow their leadership. One said “I've been very lucky from the very beginning with my assistant principal role. There's always been that conversation of when you're a principal this, when you're a principal that.” These assistant principals described dedicated time spent with the principal discussing situation and decisions. These coaching conversations were critical and valued in development.

The ability for principals to find ways to “carve out time”, as another assistant principal described it, for relevant experiences and exposure is critical. Attending various district and community meetings are ways to gain the exposure but require the assistant principal to designate time away from their other duties to do so. Attending meetings at the district level was a common thread amongst assistant principals in preparing to be a principal. The unknown of the meeting conversations, topics, and initiatives made the assistant principals feel left out and worried about their transition to the principalship.

Some of the assistant principals described a ranking or hierarchy within different schools. Assistant principals stated that in some schools the Curriculum Assistant Principal (CAP) is considered the “right hand man” of the principal and privy to more information and details unknown to the others. Some of the assistant principals interviewed were (CAP) and others were not. The (CAP) felt their experiences translated directly to the principalship and that often they were making the principal’s decisions for things like human resource and building management. One CAP noted “. I don't think [the principal] moves without having me with there or getting my opinion, so any decisions that [the principal] has to make for the school, I am right there with [them]. Two CAP’s had newer principals and felt in some respects they are “learning the position together” and thus both CAP’s felt more prepared for the principalship.
Another idea that emerged during this theme was the district’s support of assistant principals. Three assistant principals commented that they felt that certain learning communities and district leadership are preparing their assistant principals for the principalship better than others. It was referred to as an “unfair advantage” by two of these assistant principals. A different assistant principal referenced this idea and suggested:

Some people are working with leaders who are really thoughtful in their exposure, like are really deliberate in what they have their people do so that people can learn. If you have the benefit of being in a position like that, then you're better off for it, but you could totally not be.

This assistant principal continued to describe a personal goal to get support and exposure by seeking out other principals in other learning communities to help with preparation. This assistant principal asked to shadow a few principals for a day and attend school meetings simply as an observer to gain a better understanding of how different schools work.

Each assistant principal relived the experience of moving to the role. They noted that a principal identified them as a strong teacher and encouraged movement into leadership. As teachers, their principals provided opportunities to get the leadership experience necessary to become an assistant principal. Coincidentally, three assistant principals said they felt less support from their principal once they actually became an assistant principal. When asked why they felt this way, all agreed similarly that this was likely based on the fact that they had “gotten them to that position” therefore did not need as much support.

In addition, two other assistant principals felt they were receiving inadequate support from their principal. They noted that their principals was too much “in control” or “oblivious to anything other than themselves”. These two assistant principals had doubts about moving into a
principalship and worried as to whether or not the district was aware of candidates in similar situations.

Three assistant principals mentioned the personality of a principal needed to grow their leadership. One of these assistant principals commented that “you need someone who is willing to listen to you without immediately criticizing or immediately jumping in to solve the problems that you're encountering.” As for suggestions to the district, one assistant principal said:

when you select principals you have to select principals who have in mind to develop the leadership that they work with on their administrative staff. They have to have that in mind. A principal who is only capable of keeping themselves afloat, that is just barely surviving the day in, day out things that they need to accomplish, they’re not going to have the bandwidth to help anybody else along, especially the administrators are often Type A people, take the ball, get it done kind of people. If you are in that survival mode as a principal, then you're going to kind of default to that, and that's going to take away leadership opportunities from the people who are trying to learn.

Support for new and tenured principals was mentioned as a key piece in building the leadership amongst assistant principals across the district.

**Role as an Assistant Principal**

When asked if the role of the assistant principal was an effective pathway to becoming a principal, each principal responded with a “yes, but…” except for one that declared “no..”. The comments that followed the “yes” answer included specific parts of the assistant principal role that helped them understand the inner workings of a school, however each one conceded that there is no experience that can truly prepare someone for the work of a principal. One of the principals summed it up by stating:
It's less about the assistant principal position and more about a principal above you. If you are an assistant principal and you do not have a principal that is challenging you and pushing you and not giving you the answers and letting you take the lead, then no. The position in and of itself does not prepare you to be a principal. I think the person who's sitting in the seat prepares you, and that's a huge difference.

The principal’s involvement and delegation of responsibilities not only defines the role of each assistant principal within the school but the overall preparedness for the principalship. One principal discussed “I think if you're not in a position where you have had those experience, you won't be. You would learn as you went if you haven't had those experiences. The principal that you have drives what kind of experiences you get. You know?” Knowing that the “buck does not stop with the assistant principal”, the principal then deals with a variety of different tasks or situations that the assistant principal does not. In addition, two different principals commented that “there is that the majority of your development as an assistant principal looking at becoming a principal is going to happen in your building, it just can't happen any other way.”

One assistant principal felt as though it does prepare you for the principalship but that there are experiences that may not be the same across the district and that would impact the preparedness for some. Another assistant principal said “. I don't see much difference but I don't know what she does behind the scenes that I'm not involved in. Because I feel like I'm involved in everything.” A different assistant principal felt confident in preparation for the Principalship but noted that it was how to describe the work done in that role in an interview that would determine candidate selection. This assistant principal explained:

I think I'm capable of running a school, I think the biggest factor for me would be ... Sit down with me and walk me through how I should talk about this. I need somebody to sit
down with me and give me a mock interview. Talk to me about the kinds of things I should be able to speak to go be able to get this next job.

Some tasks are listed as things that were unknown to assistant principals, the most common are budgeting and community involvement. All but one of the assistant principals described budgeting as a task they know little about. Similarly, two of the principals remembered being nervous and frightened about the budget when they began the role. One respondent described the role as an assistant principal and what helped them prepare, and stated:

It's just the breadth, the amount of things we are responsible for and that constant immediate decision making. I don't know who could prepare you for that, but I would say it did not occur to me when I was applying for this job or even in grad school, the amount of things I would be responsible for and that kind of compartmentalization that has to happen in your head.

Attending county and community wide meetings are mentioned as a component that assistant principals know little about or had no experience in, but that each valued as an important piece for understanding the principalship.

An assistant principal felt that the role of an assistant principal did prepare a candidate for the principalship and explained:

In relation to principalship, assistant principalship definitely prepares you in regards to developing the skillset of working with people, the ability to multitask, the ability to handle stressful situations, handle different crises. Definitely, in that regard, I think it's a great training ground. I do think that there are different skillsets. It's a different position, so a principalship, you're kind of the captain of the entire ship. I feel that in the assistant principalship, you're kind of that second in command, so you're making sure that the day
to day operations are in order. You're kind of that front line of defense, before people can get to the principal, in a good or bad way.

This comment alludes to the roles of the principal and assistant principal being different, but that the assistant principal role is necessary in preparation for the principalship. The length of time, or tenure, in the role as assistant principal came up in this theme and one principal stated:

I think that you can stay in this role for years or you can transition out in one or two and still be effective as a principal. I think that until you become a principal, you don't know that the experience that you need as a principal, you're not going to necessarily get until you're in that role. But I do think, as an assistant principal, there are certain skills that you develop that make you better prepared.

In contrast, another principal noted the length of time personally spent as an assistant principal and the exposure and experiences within that time frame. During the ten plus years that principal had spent as an assistant principal provided experience in “absolutely everything” and helped with confidence during the transition. The same principal also admitted that maybe ten years had been too long to be an assistant principal.

Each respondent spoke about their path to becoming a school leader. In most cases, those that felt the assistant principal position was helpful in preparation also previously served in another school wide leadership position, curriculum or student support, drawing connection between instruction and outside support and leadership. One principal discussed time as an assistant principal and stated “[I was like the] principal of a smaller school within a school”. The assistant principal’s principal had separated the grade levels and allowed the assistant principal’s to work independently over that part of the school. This principal said that this experience felt
more like a principalship and was critical during the transition. One assistant principal mentioned a similar concept that occurs in another district in the secondary schools and described:

[there are] schools within schools where they have assistant principals that lead the smaller school, I think maybe some of that where you are technically the be all end all. Yes, there is still a head of school per se, but in your school, there is a chain of command and at the top of that chain, you are the top of that chain because you are over to that school.

This assistant principal agreed that there was value in this model.

All respondents agreed the principal drives the experiences of assistant principals. The principal assigned the tasks to complete and evaluated them against the goals. The hierarchy of assistant principals came up again in this section of the discussion, because eight respondents believe that there are certain assistant principals that become the “right hand man” and are assigned certain tasks to a specific assistant principal. In these examples, this particular assistant principal or CAP received more exposure and experience. One assistant principal commented on this concept and said “principals are thoughtful in their exposure.” A principal summarized the position of an assistant principal in preparation for the principalship by saying “I believe it's a pathway because it was the only way.”

**Suggestions for Preparation**

The suggestions for preparation for the principalship are similar amongst principals and assistant principals. Neither group made suggestions to Universities or Colleges regarding preparation, instead the suggestions and ideas centered on what districts and district leaders can do to improve the preparation of new principals. The most common suggestion included the use of an internship type of program for assistant principals seeking the principalship. The ability to
view the role and its requirements prior to entering the position was an important factor noted by both the assistant principals and principals. A unique idea presented by a principal was to use “substitute principals” in the absence of a sitting principal. This principal suggestion:

They'll bring in a veteran, retired principal to fill the seat until they can hire someone long term. Why don't we kick up an assistant principal? Let some aspiring assistant principal we think might be close to ... Give them a temporary assignment, when everyone knows that it's temporary. We have done that in like an ... They're called interim principals. But something that has a definitive end. When you're an interim principal, the expectation is they're grooming you to become that same principal.

Nine of the respondents discussed the importance of experiencing the role of a principal. The opportunity to “own the decisions based on information available” is more parallel to the work of a principal and a worthwhile experience for those interested in becoming one. One principal recounted a program that was in the district many years ago. It was regarded as a positive and relevant experience. This principal described:

They used to have these ... I think it was a year or a year and a half long internship, so you got completely released. I think this was for assistant principals, it wasn't for principals, but you were released from your work, and you spent an entire year rotating through all the different departments. You spent time in elementary school, middle school, high school, you spent time at the central office, you spent time in the different learning communities, just kind of getting an overview, a taste, of everything that's involved in leadership, and then they got jobs as assistant principals as soon as that internship was over.
While there were other pathways to the Principalship, this respondent felt the opportunity helped to shape an understanding amongst newly hired principals of what the job entailed. Respondents mentioned other counties as well and recalled these programs were effective in preparing and “grooming” assistant principals for the principal role. Certain districts were known for having a “mentorship” or “practicum” based in-house program for assistant principals. In those districts no principal can be appointed to the position without having gone through this preparation program. According to the respondents, the success of these programs lie within the length of time a principal stayed in their position. Meaning that the principals who had participated in district led preparation programs in other districts remained a principal for a longer period of time. This type of district led program or experience was referred to “invaluable” by two principals.

Over and over the concept of a program that placed participants directly into the position of the principal was discussed. The ability to have an experience where a candidate is thinking about the work within a school from the “viewpoint of a principal and not an assistant principal” is critical and would be highly beneficial. The ability to shadow a principal for a day was also suggested. One assistant principal commented, “[to] spend a day with a principal, go and sit down with that principal, sit in that seat. Not your principal, because you shadow that person all day long. Go to other schools and see what’s going on at other schools. What role does that principal have? How is it different than what you see your principal doing? Give us those opportunities…” Of course, this experience can be done easily but the respondents who commented on it, mentioned it would be more valuable if the shadowing day was structured and purposeful.
Both principals and assistant principals mentioned the tenure of an assistant principal as a suggestion to preparation. One principal explained:

I would say selecting principals who are truly, thoroughly prepared for the role as opposed to less experienced, not philosophically there. I'm not saying it's a number of years thing because it's not. It's really a mindset that you're there to grow everyone within the school, students, teachers, administrators alike.

A definitive amount of time a person spent as an assistant principal was not as important as the varied experiences each had as an assistant principal. One principal agreed and commented:

If you were to fast-track, and all of a sudden, after three years, become a principal, or even next year, become a principal, it would probably be extremely unsettling for you because you haven't done school-based work as an administrator long enough to have a really good feel for all the stuff. There'd be things that you'd come into your building, and really your APs are the experts and you're not, and that would be a weird, kind of uncomfortable situation for you, and they would know that, too. Right?

They continued:

It's not to say that becoming a principal quickly's not valid or valuable, it is, but I think for those people, they're going to have a steeper learning curve, or they're going to be more uncomfortable and stressed out just because there's lots of parts of the school that they never experienced as an assistant principal. Now they're supposed to lead it and have opinions about it, and they've never felt it before, whatever it is.

There is no current requirement on tenure as an assistant principal. The principals believed it should be about five years, while assistant principals thought it to be a little less at three years.
All the assistant principals discussed the drive from the district about moving up within two to three years.

An interesting suggestion mentioned by an assistant principal referred to the interview process and the scripted interview. This assistant principal recommended that the process for principal selection be based on observations of current work as an assistant principal and real time answers to situations that could arise (or did during the observation). Two principals also believed that in order to be successful in preparation, assistant principals have to advocate for what they want and find ways to have experiences. A final notation regarding suggestions included the requirement for a definition of the role of an assistant principal. Five assistant principals recommended this. One assistant principal put the responsibility of leadership on the district and claimed:

As a district you've got make sure that the principals you already have in the buildings are actual leaders. They're not just instructional leaders for the teachers and for the kids. They're instructional leaders for their APs as well. I think the districts need to define clearly what they want out of a principal and out of an assistant principal. I think that has to be the biggest part of it. There has to be some definition of what this is. Not just a job description, but what do I want? What do I want to see in my buildings?

Another assistant principal said “clear job description and having someone evaluate the work because the assistant principal job is not an assistant principal job, it's an assistant to the principal job.”

**Theme Four: Role/Responsibilities**

This theme evoked emotion from all respondents and illustrates not only the differences between the roles of principal and assistant principal but what the roles signified for certain
respondents. Without question, all respondents agreed that the position of the assistant principal and principal differ in many areas. All respondents expressed the need for there to be more similarities in the positions to help with transition to and preparation for the principalship.

Principals discussed the role of an assistant principal. Each shared a different experience but felt being an assistant principal was a necessary pathway to their current position as principal. In describing different experiences, principals shared thoughts on the role as assistant principal. One principal said “I saw myself [as assistant principal] 10, 15 years I could do that and frankly, you can't. I commend the AP's who can do that job for a long time. It is tough, and I think this job is equally tough but after a while you need something new.” Another mirrored these exact thoughts by saying “I know that there are some life-long APer's. Look, if you can do it and you're great at it God bless, but for me I was like ... You work so hard as an AP, I'm like, ‘I don't think I can do this for the next 10 years,’ and that's probably what I'll think about this job in another three or four.” Additionally, a different principal commented on the principal role similarly by saying “everyone that I've spoken to will say that, they'll say it used to be that your principals would stay for ten, fifteen, twenty years, but they all say you don't need to stay that long. Keep moving, because if not it's just a stressful job.” A principal suggested that some assistant principals may not seek out the principalship anymore because it overwhelming – filled with “red tape”, “bureaucracies”, and “too much accountability”. These quotes highlight the amount of different tasks and initiatives that assistant principals and principals are responsible for and the difficulties each face.

A principal described what the first year as assistant principal was like by noting “my first year as an AP there were so many things going on it was unreal but still I had evaluation which was like 40 teachers, testing, and the little stuff…. the easy stuff like transportation.”
While every principal agreed that the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal vary from school to school, nearly all principals listed the responsibilities assigned during the role as an assistant principal. The comments on the tasks included:

- “You are the buses, safety, and discipline guy.”
- “I did a lot of discipline of cause, because schools are like, ‘Hey that what they want the most help with.’ I did the emergence plan, I held parent conferences with parents and students. I did discipline, I did special programs, like if they had an awards programs. I did things like that working behind the scenes for graduation. I sat in on meetings, I sat in on the local school advisory council which is now school governance council.”
- “I had to do a lot of things, so I had to run title one. I did the master schedule, I ran the instructional programs, I did all of the career academies.”
- “I did attendance and testing and [I] didn't get chance to do anything else.”
- “Having lived the AP job, yeah. I got to see these kids, I got to evaluate these teachers, I got to get this testing done.”

When asked about the differences in the role and the transition to the principal, each principal defined the principal role as “bigger picture”. One principal specified:

The role of principal is complex where I think it's more of a state of being that you got to be ready to expect the unexpected. You never know what's going to happen. I think it's more of a keeping calm, soothing the waters if you will, and be willing to make a rational decision and include as many people as possible when you have the time.

Six of the principals described the finality of the principalship and the decisions that are required of a principal. One principal declared “the buck stops at your desk and doesn't go anywhere else,
and you are held accountable for that decision.” Commentary from the principals described the role and responsibilities of a principal and echo these sentiments and emphasize the importance of the position. Simply put, when others outside the building want answers they come to the principal not the assistant principal. This can be particularly difficult in the first year as a principal. One principal said “the first year is a daunting year because you're constantly looking over your shoulder and going, ‘I'm supposed to make this final decision?’ That took a little bit of getting used to. As an assistant principal, you rested knowing ultimately it was the principal. Not you. You had cover. If this goes south, it's really the principal, not me.” The principalship, as compared to the assistant principalship, is described by a principal as:

- It's communication and it's visioning I guess. I start with communication first because I feel like one of the challenges that I constantly have in the back of my mind, and it's sort of a stressor really, is every single time you have a conversation, and I didn't feel this was as an AP, people take that to mean everything. If you miscommunicate, or if you talk about something in front of a group of parents that doesn't exactly align with where you wanted to go, you kind of got off the cuff and talked about something you were excited about but weren't really ready to commit, they could have taken that as the gospel's truth and are expecting that to happen next year, and then they go and talk to people.

- We have so many things to do, so many initiatives, need to support so many different kinds of kids that they're just desperate for people who can tell them what to focus on. If the world of education's never going to change we're going to have a million things to do always it seems like, but if we can just understand these are the things we're focusing on and all of the rest of it we'll do it. We don't have to put 100% energy in to those things. To me it's visioning and you do that as an AP in small little facets.
• If I could explain it to any Assistant Principal I would say you could have a stack of stickers with your face on it. Anything that comes out of your building put your face on it. It's not like that as an Assistant Principal. If you're an Assistant Principal and you're supervising ELAs, Social Studies, you do AP testing or whatever. If a custodian gets drunk over the weekend with your school T-shirt on and your name badge on you don't have to answer to that. The Principal does, regardless.

• There's things that you don't get to see at the assistant principal level that you think you know, but when you get in the seat. Truly everything falls on the principal, so every job that assigned in the building comes back on you.

• When you're the principal, all of a sudden ... When you're assistant principal, you're in the know, but you're really not. You're in the know for some. You're not in the know for all. When you're the principal, all of a sudden you're in the know for all, and there was a lot under that umbrella of all that I wasn't privy to, or knew about, or knew was a part of the position. The door comes open, and in walks whatever, and there's the question, and you go, 'Huh? What? I'm supposed to know this answer and you need an answer now?' Then when you would call for support, they would say it's at the principal's discretion.

• The principal does not do. The principal delegates. The APs do. That's as simple as I can break it down, the difference between our roles. I am going to dictate to them, "Go do." When someone somewhere else comes to me and says this gets done, I go, "Okay, this needs to go to ... Here, you need to do." That might not be an assistant principal, but that's ... The assistant principals do the dirty work. The assistant principals do the day to day work. The assistant principals do what needs to get done. They're much more task orientated. They have the checklist.
Five principals categorized their position as a goal oriented visionary. One stated that the role is “long term strategic plan-oriented. It's the horizon plan. It's the what's next. Our task is to figure out and plan for what's next, not what's now.” Unlike the assistant principal, one principal suggested that principals are tasked with “get this strategic plan done for the next ...three to five years. Spend the next two months figuring out the budget for six months from now.”

A newer principal described the position prior to becoming a principal. This principal stated that in the recent years as an assistant principal the role was task oriented and never changing. In fact, because of the amount of lists this person had to complete, this now principal was “not interested in being innovative anymore.” They felt that in this position as an assistant principal there was little ability to create change for the better of students and the school. Another principal confirmed this thought by claiming that an assistant principal “does not think like a principal. They don’t have to.”

One principal reflected on the comparison of the role of the assistant principal and described:

You're not in a minutia state anymore. You're big picture on everything. All those duties, all those little things that are necessary to make a school run, you don't do any of that stuff, specifically, anymore. It doesn't belong to you. Testing isn't yours, scheduling isn't yours, textbooks aren't- none of that stuff is yours, specifically. I mean it is, but it isn't, so it's always this global mindset, and it's not even ... I mean, you're thinking about [School Name], and then you're also thinking about [District Name] and the community at large. It's trying to get out of your building and keep that perspective as you make decisions about what goes on in your building.
Finding ways to experience the role of a principal was a key suggestion from five principals. One principal described the process of building the assistant principals by suggesting to them:

Don't go to schools just like yours, go to different schools, or different levels. Go see a high school, go see an elementary school. Go see a diverse school, go see a [school in another learning community]. I think it changes your perspective and can inform your work better. I can't create experiences like that for you, here, if you work for me.

The differences in experiences across the district make preparation for the principalship even more complex. The structure of the school building or even the learning community that an assistant principal is in can affect their experiences and opportunities. A principal verified this by saying:

It depends on the school really. The way that the school is set up, it can be more task oriented versus as a global picture. I think that it depends on the school and how the assistant principal utilizes a team versus are they just giving things to do versus being asked questions and feeling value, their opinion matters. It's a school to school thing. I don't think it's just the assistant principal role is the same at every school or even the autonomy they have.

Assistant principals agreed on all accounts that differences exist between the roles and from school-to-school. An assistant principal who had been in the position five years said that:

I think that in an assistant principal role, in my opinion, and I do think it's different in different buildings, but I think there is so many in the moment, so many different things that are thrown at assistant principals, you can be in the middle of doing one thing and you have to know how to immediately transition to something else or add something else
onto your plate. I think as a principal, you're kind of the person who's guiding the boat, who is building connections, who is out in the community, developing partnerships. Another assistant principal claimed that knowing there are changes and differences from “school-to-school and level to level” makes it more difficult to collaborate with each other but more importantly, makes it difficult to define their work together. After reflecting for a minute, an assistant principal said “I think just dealing with teachers and students requires a certain skillset that might be different than dealing with and meeting with the superintendent.” One assistant principal claimed that some commonalities may exist:

Across districts, across schools, across states, is that person [the assistant principal(s)] is regarded as the second in command. That person is able, that person has the skillset to be able to assume that principalship role if the principal is not in the building. That person is second in line, in terms of making decisions. If a decision needs to be made and the principal is not available, in some cases if the principal is available, that person is seen as a decision maker in the school, as an instructional leader in the school. I think that would be common across.

Another assistant principal agreed in the role differing across schools and expressed “I don't think everyone has the same experience, from what I see. I think if you just approach the assistant principal position as, these are the tasks that are required of me and these are the tasks that I'm going to do".

Six of the assistant principals knew that their role was different than that of a principal and were able to speak to the pieces they felt they needed to learn before transitioning. Understanding the budget, human resource situations, and community involvement were the three key areas that assistant principals designated as needing more growth in.
One critical part in the differences in roles and responsibilities was described by all but one of the assistant principals. This is where emotion was expressed. The assistant principals felt as though their position is de-valued because stakeholders know that they are not the final answer. Often if stakeholders do not get the answer that they want from an assistant principal, they know they have the ability to go to the principal to seek a different answer. Four assistant principals became visibly agitated when mentioning this piece. An example of this was described by an assistant principal who said:

It's really hard in this position because we're not allowed to make any decisions. All the instructional leadership I do even to try and prevent failures at AP meetings, all of that has to be run by [the principal]. All that has to be run by the principal. All of it has to be approved by the principal. [The principal] can walk in tomorrow and say, ‘Oh, no. We're going to change it and do it this way.’ There's no ... power is the wrong word. There's no strength behind our strengths and what we do because at any moment somebody's going to walk in your office and say, ‘I've changed my mind. I've seen something else, I want to go this way.’ It is incredibly hard to figure out how to go to that next level and what you're going to do when you get there.

Four assistant principals commented unfavorably on the current responsibilities that they have by noting that it has very little to do with the why they wanted to be in the position or the preparation for where they wanted to go. One even described the work as “crap, and just stuff that is no fun... the parent complaints, the whip cracking, etc.” These assistant principals stressed the importance of their role and responsibilities and how principals should be aware of what they do each day in order to function better as the head of the school. While expressing their opinion on the role of the assistant principal, one said “I feel like our job is a lot harder, and
a lot more work than what I see. What I hear from [the principal] is I'm working, I'm trying to run a school, I cannot do these things.”

For assistant principals, the emotion behind their work was divided. One assistant principal felt very positive about the role and noted “This is a great job. You got to get that bird's eye view of everything. Then you can support teachers, support students, support parents. You have a greater opportunity to impact more people.” When asked if the role could be defined, an assistant principal responded “besides assist the principal and make sure that the principal looks good, no, [I can’t].” Two assistant principals discussed the difficulty in defining the role and said “those kinds of things are much bigger tasks than that simple description implies. No, it's not exactly easy to define the role” and “the roles differ at the levels, and then school to school.”

Five of the assistant principals requested the ability to collaborate more often with “meaningful work” with other assistant principals across the district. They expressed a desire to learn from other assistant principals what different tasks they are doing in their buildings. An interesting comment from an assistant principal centered on others observing the work and determining if the assistant principal was ready to be a principal. This person remarked “we don't all fit in this box, so when you come to observe, and when you come to make house calls, if you will, on the school, be aware of that.”

Three assistant principals described the reason for getting into the role as a means to impact more students. All assistant principals explained their path to their current position by saying that they were strong teachers and leaders within the building, they were impacting change within their building and their principal or someone suggested they go into administration to continue to make a difference. One assistant principal points out through tears:
That's why I did what I did because I thought if I could affect 150 kids, and as a department chair I can affect thousands of kids. As an administrator think of how many more kids I can affect from year to year. You don't have that reach as an AP. You don't. As a principal, I feel as though you would have broader scope. I still have the fear in the back of my head that's still the amount ... It's not about the praise for it, it's just about the amount of politics that go in it. How much change can you truly affect for all of these kids? That's what I got into it for is because I thought I'm doing something great for these kids.

Another compared the roles in terms of day-to-day work and the impact they perceived to be occurring:

As an AP. I am doing a lot of entertaining people, of keeping people happy, of creating paperwork, of creating schedules whether that's for testing or the bell schedule or team meetings and agendas. Even discipline, while I have to make decisions with that, it's a lot of here's 30 minutes putting this all into this thing. Creating kids' schedules just for their day to day, their class schedules. Whereas I think as a principal, and I could be proven completely wrong with this one day, but as a principal you have somebody doing that work for you so that you can truly be an instructional leader in the building. You can actually be in classrooms which I haven't gotten to do all year this year. You can truly make the decisions that drive a vision for a school that drive what your initiatives are going to be and how you're going to really affect students' education.

Overall, for assistant principals this topic of roles and responsibilities brought up emotion and passion for their work. In all cases, it seemed as though no one had asked them about their role and simply explaining it made each assistant principal emotional.
Findings by Theme - Mini Case One: Elementary School Principal

Stake (2005) describes the addition of mini cases to qualitative research as important if it adds depth to the current case study. Mini cases should be included when they provide “self-centering complexity and situational uniqueness” (p.6). This mini case was included to highlight the perspective of an elementary principal in comparison to the secondary assistant principals and principals in the larger case study.

The elementary school principal used for this mini case was new to the position. This principal had a background that was strong in curriculum and leadership. This mini case was included to highlight another aspect of preparation for the principalship, as it was widely known that the elementary assistant principal and principalship are different from that in secondary. In many cases there was only one assistant principal for every school, and it meant that both leaders worked very closely together for all aspects of the school. In a secondary school, there was often between two and four assistant principals and sometimes administrative assistants, which helped with delegation of managerial tasks and teacher/student support. This principal admitted that there were differences between secondary and elementary, but the principal also admitted to only having elementary experience.

Theme One: Evaluation

This theme was not discussed as a part of this principal’s interview. The respondent’s comments about preparation for the principalship were not influenced by or with evaluation. When this principal was directly asked about the LKES evaluation, this person admitted this evaluation played little part in preparation for the principalship, although it was also noted by this principal as being a “necessary tool.” This principal did not describe the principal selection process during the interview.
Theme Two: Instructional Leadership

Based on the background of this principal, instructional leadership is a large part of the work done and the foundation for preparation. In the interview, the principal directly noted this by saying:

I think the curriculum and support and having that background was a huge benefit to having that instructional component that I think the teachers see as a huge plus, because they see you not only as having teaching, but having been through the staff development and the curriculum leadership that a building leader needs.

In the elementary setting, principals work very closely with the instructional planning and initiatives within the building. This principal commented that it was important to stay current on new ideas and practices within the field so that it would be possible to speak and coach teachers about instruction best practices. This principal commented:

I still try to make sure that I am developing in the area of curriculum support as well, because I think that, if I ask them to do something, or if somebody needs support in that area, I can't really tell them that they need support if I'm not current on what's going on, like what does guided reading look like?

This principal noted that within the role of the assistant principal staying fresh in curriculum was difficult at times and stated:

I would attend different trainings over the summer to make sure that I was current in practices. I would try to pick one curriculum piece every year that this is what I want to focus on and this is what I want to have my hand in, but it didn't work out.

Overall the importance of curriculum was present throughout the entire interview. The principal continued to stress the influence that background and knowledge in curriculum was essential to
developing a building leader. It was noted, “[going] as a curriculum support teacher to an AP then to the principalship, it gave me the perspective of every avenue.” The principal even stated that in terms of preparation for the principalship the “CST role probably supported [that more] because you could do data talks with the teachers, you could really be involved in the curriculum and the instruction piece.”

**Theme Three: Preparation**

**College/University/District Preparation**

The principal described the formal preparation for leadership at different universities. The masters program was described as being the “practical stuff … classes such as law and things of that nature that I don't necessarily utilize nearly as much as I do my specialist [work]”. In contrast, the principal noted this about the specialist program:

> It could just be because that was more current, but they really went in with data utilization and protocols and practices and things that I co- Like, I still have that binder that I keep on my shelf that I refer back to. What would be a good practice to solve this problem? Like I said, I could be just because it was more current.

**Principal Support**

The principal noted the importance of a principal’s role in encouraging an assistant principal’s path to leadership. This principal admitted that an invitation from the principal to work outside of the classroom started this person’s on the path to school leadership. This principal described this experience by saying that:

> …. my principal had reached out to me to see if I was interested in taking of the EIP program. That was what kind of got me on the leadership path, is I had dabbled in some leadership opportunities as a second grade teacher, but when [the principal] approached...
me about that, that opened up a whole new avenue because it gave me K-5 experience and it also gave me opportunities to work with teachers as well. The principal admitted never wanting to leave the classroom, in fact stating “originally, I was never leaving the classroom.” However, the exposure and support for the role as a leader within the building helped the pursuit of a leadership career. This principal noted:

In those opportunities, I decided to go back and get my leadership degree, not necessarily having any set goal as to what I was going to do with it, but I just kept ... There was a bunch of supporters who were saying, "You really need to go do this". That was a good time in my life to go and do that, so I got my masters.

**Role as an Assistant Principal**

As the principal worked on a masters degree there were various roles and responsibilities in position as an assistant principal. Working as part of the Local School Advisory Committee (LSAC) as an assistant principal, this principal developed the strategic plan for the school and partnered with stakeholders and stated:

I worked closely with the CST and we did a lot of staff development sessions and things along that nature, leadership team, all of those pay-for-performance. I was able to, in my role, get involved in a lot of different aspects of the school. From that point, I was debating whether I wanted to go as an AP or curriculum support teacher. I chose curriculum support because I still wasn't 100% convinced that I wanted to leave the classroom, so curriculum support, I felt I still got to work closely with the kids and the teachers and having my hand in that aspect.

The curriculum support teacher position created the foundation that led this principal to the role of assistant principal and ultimately principal. This principal felt that the strength in curriculum
and working with teachers directly helped in preparation for school leadership – namely the principalship.

**Suggestions for Preparation**

Mirroring the ideas that came from the secondary leadership interview, this principal believed that an internship of sorts would best prepare assistant principals for their role as a principal. The principal stated, “being able to shadow and just seeing what that day-to-day interaction looks like and going through, and you can never predict when the hard problems are going to hit, but having some of those experiences are huge.” This person mentioned that the relationship between a principal and assistant principal in an elementary school was important because it was often just the two of them made up the leadership. Although the assistant principal was privy to many interactions and decisions within the school at this level and because of this relationship, it was still hard to predict what issues might arise. This principal described this by saying:

Even if they're sitting with you side-by-side, but there's some of those tough parent conversations that, as a principal, we handle because that's our role, but, as an AP, if we're never given those opportunities, you're having to go through that as a principal, if that makes sense.

The principal commented that in preparation for the principalship, a principal who was trying to grow assistant principals should “hand off some of those tough decisions” so that they may learn and grow from the experience. This principal described the principal’s ability to support assistant principals through the process and offered opportunities to learn as essential. Understanding the culture piece was a big component to the success of all new principals.
Theme Four: Role/Responsibilities

The nature of the elementary school assistant principal position was different from that of a secondary assistant principal. The reason for including this mini case within this study was to highlight that piece. In the interview, the principal described feelings about the role as an assistant principal by saying “that's what I hated about the AP role, is that, at the elementary level, there's only one, so you kind of take on all of it.” When asked about the role differences and similarities between an assistant principal and principal, this person commented “I think they were very different. A lot of what I did, again, was managing the building and making sure that the building ran without a hitch day-in and day-out.” This was in contrast to the role of the principal. The principal continued to describe the role as an assistant principal by defining the details of the work:

If there weren't enough subs to cover classes, we were covering classes. If filling in were needed. It was, again, it was the day-to-day operations is what I felt my role became just because, again, there's only one principal, one AP, and you're the only two, technically, leaders in the building. When it came to discipline, the counselor technically isn't a disciplinarian. It has to fall on either you or the principal, so, a lot of times that stuff just fell on the AP.

This brought to light an important piece about what the differences were as a principal. The principal stated that a principal was “more into the people” and that the realm of the work dealt with more types of people and stakeholders who were looking for accountability and reliability. The principal stated firmly:

Not that, as an AP, you weren't into the people and the relationships, but even more so now, it's a huge political shift as far as making sure the foundation and the PTA and the
leadership team and the School Governance Council aren't working against each other, but they're working together toward the same strategic plan. It's managing a lot of people….

The role of both the assistant principal and principal encompassed responsibility to human resource management especially in the sense of teacher and staff evaluations, but the principal stated that as a principal the biggest change was in working collectively with groups. The principal remarked “keeping all the groups aligned, but happy at the same time and making sure that everyone's vision and everyone is working towards a common goal versus, well this team made this decision, but this team felt it should've been a different decision.” Working together across groups for a common goal and keeping the focus on student achievement was key.

The most influential piece of the work of a principal, as identified by this principal, was the “how do you manage culture and climate? Because everything is all about relationships and it's about relationship building.” Preparation for the principalship could be improved by providing the assistant principal with experiences in managing the culture piece and working through different situations. The principal remarked:

Just walking through different scenarios of a culture like, if you have a staff that's morale is way low, how do you manage that? How do you re-start or jump-start that? How do you shift that culture? Then, coming in, on the flip side, you have morale that's really great because things have been really loose. The teachers haven't had to do much data collection, so there's been lacking in other areas. Obviously, if you start to put stuff in place, and they're having to do a little bit more work, that's going to shift. How do you balance those culture shifts I think is probably the biggest support that you could provide?
Managing the community and parent groups was important as well. Navigating that piece of school culture outside as well as inside was key to the success of a principal and not often shared as a responsibility, in its entirety, with the assistant principal. The principal explained that there was a “balance” of expectations by all stakeholders that was the responsibility of the principal and not one that was taught in formal schooling or within the role of the assistant principal.

Additionally, the principal was asked about the definition of the role of a principal and assistant principal based on these responses. When describing an opinion it was noted that “I think it probably varies from school to school. In trying to support other APs, through the mentoring, is I've created a list of what it looks like at my school, but if you shared that list with some other APs, it's very different,” meaning that the roles and responsibilities are different across schools. The principal also mentioned an interaction with another elementary school assistant principal by saying:

I have, in working with the AP that took over my position at my old school, and when I shared with her, this is what I do during the summer, this is kind of a snapshot to kind of expect each month, she was like, "Oh my gosh. It's overwhelming". That, right there, tells me that it looked very different at her school. Some of it, I think, that the role takes on what the individual makes it. Again, that all goes back to having only so many hours in a day to be able to do so much.

This principal felt better prepared for the position overall than any of the secondary principals interviewed. The experience of this principal was only in the elementary setting, and based on the structure of the leadership, the principal admitted was included in all aspects of the school throughout each different role. It was an important comparison to the preparation, experience, and responsibilities given to a secondary assistant principal.
### Findings by Theme - Mini Case Two: The Researcher

The second mini case – a smaller case within the case study – focused on myself as a researcher. My experience as a leader within this county has afforded me the opportunity to see school leadership across many schools. I have been able to see leadership at different levels and observe the different roles that leaders take on in various environments. When I started this research, I wanted to be able to use my experience as a detailed part of the findings and thus included this mini case. Before beginning this research, I thought about the work I have done and how it has shaped me as a leader and impacted my professional path. This section was completed prior to conducting the interviews as a strategy to set aside my own experience and preconception and contributed to bracketing my positionality.

I view the role of the assistant principal and principal as different in many ways. I agree with the research described in the literature review. Much of what an assistant principal does changes when/if that person becomes a principal. In my time as a county leader, I watched new principals emerge from the assistant principalship and would say that the biggest change was the vantage point. As a principal, the leader must think about ideas on a much broader scope. All thoughts and decisions must encompass ideals and goals within the building as well as strategies and initiatives of the district. Many of the assistant principals, I worked with transitioned well to their new positions with the support of the county leadership within their learning communities. Almost all of them had been given an opportunity to work on a broader scope within the district and understand the importance of their position.

That is where my role in the district plays a part in this research. Within my role, I was given the ability to set goals within the learning community, partner with various stakeholders, and make decisions on budgeting and personnel. I attended county-wide leadership meetings and
gained insight into how the district functioned and learned that every principal is a critical piece of the district’s leadership team. I partnered with principals and worked with them on developing and supporting their strategic plans. I helped schools make decisions on personnel and budgeting around curriculum areas. In addition, I attended community and school board meetings to provide information and be a link between parents and schools.

For instance, my position was created at the time that new standards for math were being introduced around the country. I went to trainings, seminars, and professional development to learn about the implementation of these standards and how best to support schools and teachers. At the same time, I was tasked with helping principals introduce these standards and practices to their community. I became the expert in that area and supported teachers, curriculum leaders, and school administrators in math. I made decisions on math placement, common unit assessments, and student/teacher resources for my 24 schools. I had to collaborate with various stakeholders and cater my support for schools independently. This experience helped me to view leadership on a broader scope. It allowed me to understand the county’s expectations and helped me design the strategic initiatives to align with them.

Another part of my position allowed me to use data from standardized tests to analyze my particular school’s performance in science. With the achievement rates as they were, I designed a plan for improving science instruction and achievement in the learning community. I attended conferences and professional development that helped drive my support for the schools. Then I would work with each of the principals to create a plan that would increase interest and overall achievement in science. In addition, I opened five science, or STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) specific labs at elementary schools within the learning community. I
partnered with principals on budgeting, resources, and support in opening each lab. I hired teachers for the labs and provided training and collaboration for each.

Finally, an important piece of my work was collaborating with others in my position across the district. Not only was I responsible for the work that was done within my learning community and accountable for increases in achievement, but I was tasked with creating and driving department goals district-wide. This piece of my work allowed me to work with various leaders across the district. I attended district-wide principals’ meetings and was present for several district leadership meetings. I was forced to think about making decisions bigger than for that of a single school or learning community. This part was critical in my development as a leader. This is also the part I am not sure that all assistant principals get exposure to. As an assistant principal now, I know that much of our work is focused on our school, students, and teachers. While we attend district meetings, it is usually with other assistant principals, and having seen other similar types of meetings, I know that they are different than a principal or district leadership meeting. I felt that the district position helped me gain a deeper understanding of the overall work required of a principal. I desire to be a principal someday and believe that my work in the district position helped with my preparedness for the role. There will still be a steep learning curve, as with any new position, but my previous role helped me understand the depth of the role of the principal.

Summary

Chapter four presented the findings of this case study. I described the experiences shared by all respondents during the interviews and presented the perspectives of the two mini case studies. I began the chapter with a vignette to set the stage for the overall theme expressed by respondents in the interviews. I provided a narrative of the participants involved while trying to
maintain anonymity. My research design and methods for collecting data were created to highlight the experiences that each respondent lived. I discussed how I disaggregated the interview responses and coded the findings. I described the emerging themes within the research and how that produced additional subthemes. The findings were then presented based on themes and sub themes that developed during the interviews. A summary of the themes and sub themes is presented in the figure below (see Figure 7).
Demonstration of Themes

**Theme One: Evaluation**

*Principal Selection Process*

subjective, targeted, and lacking relevance

*LKES Evaluation Tool*

both roles required to use tool, duties vary

**Theme Two: Instructional Leadership**

assistant principals not given the opportunity or coaching

**Theme Three: Preparation**

*College/University/District Preparation*

required, but lacked in relevant work

*Principal Support*

determining factor in preparation of principals

*Role as an Assistant Principal*

varies from school to school, expectations and duties differ

*Suggestions for Preparation*

coach assistant principals and principals to prepare for leadership

**Theme Four: Role/Responsibilities**

assistant principals role not in line with principals, devalued
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purposes of this study were to determine if the position of the assistant principal was an effective pathway to the principalship and to examine both the position of the principal and assistant principal, the links between their actual and ideal responsibilities, and the accountability measures of each as related to preparation for the principalship. The study analyzed the leadership preparation, responsibilities, and evaluation of the assistant principal. Glanz (2004) described the assistant principal as underutilized and tagged that role as the “forgotten man” (p.283). The focus of this research was to analyze the pathway to the principalship and the experiences that school leaders had during their transition. Specifically, the research centered on the experiences of assistant principals and principals. It was designed a case study with a phenomenological touch to identify the actual lived experiences of the leaders in a large metropolitan school district in the southeast. The study aimed to illustrate the current state of the role as assistant principal as preparation for the principalship and whether or not it was an effective pathway.

This phenomenological case study addressed one main research question related to the intellectual goals of the study;

1) Does the assistant principal position prepare candidates for the principalship?

Additional questions related directly to the practical goals driving the case study and incorporated the phenomenological dimension of the study:

a) To what extent do assistant principals view their position as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?
To what extent do principals view the position of the assistant principal as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the adult learning theory. Understanding how adults learn and develop knowledge was essential to analyzing the pathway to the principalship. The two key elements in the adult learning theory are that the learner changes within the process and that the process itself can be used to drive change within an organization (Knowles, 1980). These two elements were important in this study as the research aimed to identify the knowledge and skill sets of the assistant principal during preparation for the principalship. The theoretical framework was rooted in role theory and the development of one’s self-awareness professionally. Using role theory as the theoretical framework provided the premise that the definition, roles and responsibilities, and expectations in the assistant principal position impacts learned behavior that could impact the preparation for the principalship. This role theory framework defines the importance of position definition and responsibilities as they related to the assistant principalship.

The literature review highlighted the background of the study and previous work around the concepts. There was a limited amount of research on the topic of the assistant principal which indicated a need for this research and its findings. Previous research showed that historically there has never been a definition for the role of an assistant principal and that responsibilities and tasks vary from school to school and district to district. Marshall (1992) found that little consideration has been given to the position of the assistant principal in preparation for the principalship. This lack of consistency has led to confusion and misunderstanding resulting in a difficult transition to the principalship. Assistant principals have commented that after receiving a principalship, they thought they were ill-prepared for the position (Busch, MacNeil, &
Baraniuk, 2010; Kwan, 2009) and previous positions had failed to prepare them adequately to lead schools (Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2010; Koru, 1993; Kwan, 2009). Additionally, formal preparation programs were discussed as a means to obtaining the degrees necessary to becoming an assistant principal or principal. In previous years and ending in 2007, leadership preparation programs had been criticized for their lack of relevancy to current school needs, having low admission standards, and professors with little or no administrative background (Davis, et al., 2005; Levine, 2005).

**Context of Findings**

This study highlighted the true feelings of leaders and the shared experiences that defined their leadership progression. In many cases, the interviews themselves produced emotion amongst respondents as they relived their experiences and made suggestions. The ability to be able to speak about their work directly and to be able to relate to the development of leaders within their school/district, made the leaders reflective and honest about the pathway to the principalship and what was working and what needed to improve. The ownership to develop their leaders was present in all principals, while the assistant principals felt that they needed more support and understanding to move forward. The findings were presented categorized by the four themes that emerged during the interviews. The context of the findings were subdivided as well.

**Theme One: Evaluation**

This theme brought out a great deal of emotion in terms of the assistant principal role. They viewed the principal selection process as part of evaluation. Marshall and Hooley (2006) stated, “assistant principals are usually selected because of their visibility and success as teachers, department heads, counselors, or administrative interns” (p.13). If they adapted to the
varied responsibilities and traditions, they were promoted to the principalship. The process for
selection and preparation were so varied that “many talented, innovative educational leaders are
rejected for entry-level administrative positions” (p.13). Across all assistant principals and three
newly appointed principal respondents, they agreed that the process was vague and truly
subjective. A better understanding of what the district is looking for in a principal is needed.
Many respondents noted that they had been approached by a district leader for having the
promise to move forward into the principalship but the support stopped there. Those respondents
that had been a part of the process had commented it was a different experience based on the
coaching that someone had had prior to doing so. Almost all of the assistant principal
respondents, and four of the principal respondents, felt that the ability to answer questions and
“tell a story” should not be the only basis for selection to a principal candidate pool.
Additionally, knowing that duties and responsibilities differ from school-to-school, each assistant
principal may not be getting experiences necessary to be appropriate for principal selection.

The LKES evaluation tool was also mentioned. Research showed that in most cases the
duties, responsibilities, and functioning of the assistant principal varied from school-to-school,
and the consistency in evaluating the assistant principal was difficult (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).
Although the evaluation tool appeared to carry importance in the state, it also appeared as though
each of the respondents valued this tool minimally and were unable to use it for its intended
purpose. Some principals mentioned the idea of using it as a coaching tool, but no assistant
principal respondents felt as though that was happening. Instead, many principals remarked that
it was “another thing to do” and that the assistant principals role did not fit into the eight
standards. The assistant principals noted feeling like their principals were finding reasons to
categorize their work under certain standards versus providing them opportunities to work in
those areas. The LKES (GADOE, 2014) tool provided a clear expectation of the position of principal. It addressed performance indicators most associated with the position. The assistant principal position, however, was varied and different, questioning the use of the tool in coaching and developing these candidates to become a principal.

**Theme Two: Instructional Leadership**

This theme brought about the idea that the principal really defined what this meant in a school. Murphy (1998) suggested that instruction and curriculum need to become critical pieces of the principal’s leadership skill set. In this research, some principals believed that it was a shared responsibility and included others from a leadership team to help with support instruction within the building. In other cases, respondents mentioned that there was no true instructional leadership on their part or even in the school because of a lack of vision on the part of the principal. Some principals had a team of school leaders that shared the responsibility of being instructional leaders, while others delegated it to one or more leaders and/or a team to fulfill for the school. Golanda’s (1991) research demonstrated that the duties of an assistant principal were managerial in nature rather than related to leadership and provided a very narrow scope of leadership responsibilities. Assistant principals felt as though they were only able to be a true instructional leader when they were assigned that position by the principal.

**Theme Three: Preparation**

This theme had the most findings and was a large part of each interview. The phenomenological question asked of each respondent related directly to preparation therefore this area received the bulk of the findings. Preparation was discussed in a variety of ways from college/university and district programs to direct support from current principals.
Leadership preparation programs had been criticized for their lack of relevancy to current school needs, having low admission standards, and professors with little or no administrative background (Davis, et al., 2005; Levine, 2005). As respondents reflected on their college and university preparation programs, similar feelings were expressed. The program and degree were required to move into leadership positions, but each response put minimal value in the experience. The cohort and performance based programs received the most positive remarks. This type of program allowed the respondents to do relevant work and collaborate with other professionals similar to them. All respondents found the law and budget/operations classes to be the most useful in their current work. Many noted that the theory learning within these classes was useful in developing their leadership understanding, but in terms of preparing them for the day-to-day position, it was not helpful. District programs centered on preparation received mixed reviews. Some programs that were internship based were seen as useful and beneficial although costly for the district and thus discontinued. Current district programs and development meetings were seen as unhelpful in preparing leaders.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) concluded that the principal not only defined the role of the assistant principal, but also defined the relationship between the two. Support from the current principal was described as being the most influential piece in preparing assistant principals for the principalship. Wheeler and Agruso (1996) recommended that to prepare assistant principals, principals should work collaboratively with them in the decision-making process and provide support, coaching, and guidance. Principals that commented on this recalled steps their principal had taken to provide them opportunities and coaching along the way. “Bringing them in” on certain situations and discussions allowed them to get a glimpse of what the role of a principal would entail. Current assistant principals mentioned what their principal was doing to support
them. This included things such as being a part of critical decision making or being solely in charge of certain departments, grade levels, or programs within the school. Assistant principals continued to comment about how principal support varied across the district and either were favorable and unfavorable toward their current situation. Bringing the assistant principals to district meetings, introducing them to district leadership, and allowing them to take lead on a district supported building-wide initiative was important for development. The ability to see many systems at work was a critical piece to the transition to the principalship.

The role of the assistant principal was also discussed as a part of this theme. It was a common concern throughout respondents – principals and assistant principals alike – that there was not a defined role of assistant principal. There is an absence of a concrete definition of the role of the assistant principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The range of duties exemplified how assistant principals positions are not clearly defined (Kwan, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The role depended solely on the responsibilities given by the principal. A reoccurring comment was that not all assistant principals are seen equally. Within a secondary building there is often a ‘second in command’, this often being the curriculum assistant principal or CAP. The CAP was thought to have received additional responsibilities and roles, allowing them to have more opportunities for growth and experience. Additionally, it was widely known that there was a large amount of variation in roles throughout the district and support for assistant principals and their growth varied in different learning communities.

Suggestions for preparation support including a range of ideas. All respondents felt that the ability to observe the role of the principal or even a glimpse of it would be beneficial for all assistant principals. Understanding what the day-to-day responsibilities of a principal and providing similar experiences that, were listed as critical in the development of an assistant
principal. A job embedded opportunity, like an internship, was suggested by several respondents as being valuable. This mirrors the conclusion by researchers that suggests school districts have a duty to prepare assistant principals by providing relevant, performance based training and experiences as part of their responsibilities to enhance their professional position (Burgess, 1973; Lovely, 1999; Wheeler & Agruso, 1996).

**Theme Four: Role/Responsibilities**

In describing their work, principals and assistant principals admitted there was a difference in the work responsibilities and expectations. The principals described the differences as dealing with the ‘bigger picture’. Principals noted that their decisions come with finality. Regardless of who else was involved in the decision making, the principal was ultimately responsible. Principals noted that as an assistant principal they were focused on tasks, however as a principal they were now responsible for visioning and thinking about long term strategic initiatives.

Assistant principals agreed that both roles were different. The relationship with the principal was key for assistant principals in preparation. Research has determined that the principal assigns the duties and responsibilities of the assistant principals and often represent those tasks that are unwanted by the principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The assistant principals interviewed expressed concern and lack of knowledge in areas like budgeting, human resources, and community relations. Each assistant principal was motivated to learn more and wanted to engage in other activities but admitted that they needed the support and direction from their principal. The tasks that their principal assigned was critical to their development and understanding of their role. This illustrates the theoretical framework of the study by suggested that such role ambiguity leads to assistant principals experiencing a “lack of job satisfaction,
emotional problems, a sense of futility or ineffectiveness, and a lack of confidence” (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 7).

**Limitations of Findings**

The limitations of this research center on the design of the study and the current state of the district. As a novice researcher, I chose a case study with phenomenological touch. I aimed to analyze a smaller group that would be comparable to a larger group. Although the respondents represented a diverse subset, the sample size presented a limitation. The original requested number of respondents was larger than the number that participated. Two factors contributed to this. One was the amount of suggested respondents that agreed to participate and the other was the saturation of information. Assistant principals and principals that participated mirrored each other in experiences and comments during the interviews. Therefore, even though the proposed number of respondents was not obtained, I did not seek additional respondents. With the similarities in the interviews, I was concerned about saturation of information and was comfortable in ending my research.

In addition to this, I relied on the advice and suggestion of the area superintendents in order to find assistant principals and principals to participate. Therefore it was not random in nature but purposeful in design. When I met with the area superintendents I gave them a list of criteria of school leaders that would fit this research design and while their reach and experience within their learning community is vast, it is a single perception of the appropriate candidates for this research, thus creating another limitation.

The interviews themselves presented limitations. As a phenomenological case study the interviews were unstructured in nature. Respondents commented on the themes that were most relevant to their experience or work and as a result, some of the themes had less comments with
certain respondents. I did not have a particular set of required interview questions or interview design. Instead, my interviews began with one question and developed based on the experiences and responses of the respondents. In order to truly study the lived experience of the respondent, the time for each interview differed as well. Responses for the themes differed in detail, length, and emotion which created the variances within the interviews.

The current state of the district and my role also provided another limitation. At the time of the research the district was in search of a superintendent. This idea of change could have created hesitation in answering some of the questions – particularly the demographic questions that centered on support from the district. Additionally, my relationship with the respondents or my reputation within the district could have impacted the comments and findings. Additionally, my district office allowed me to create relationships with various district leaders and respondents could have viewed this as bias toward the district. While this could have influenced their responses, I felt that the respondents expressed true emotion and were very honest in their responses. My reputation in the district and/or my rapport with the respondents could have created trust within the interviews which is critical to qualitative research.

**Implications of Findings**

This phenomenological case study addressed one main research question related to the intellectual goals of the study; 1) Does the assistant principal position prepare candidates for the principalship? The findings show that the role of the assistant principal loosely prepares candidates for the principalship. It was a required step to becoming a principal and each principal respondent had served in as an assistant principal, however, their roles and responsibilities differed greatly from the role of a principal. Additional questions related directly to the practical goals of the case study: a) To what extent do assistant principals view their position as
preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast? In this case study, assistant principals did not view their position as preparation for the principalship. Overall, the assistant principals felt unsupported and unsure about the pathway to the principalship. These assistant principals wanted to experience new situations that forced them to think like a principal and they were craving coaching and feedback necessary before transitioning. And b) To what extent do principals view the position of the assistant principal as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast? The principals looked favorably on their position as an assistant principal as preparation for the principalship. Each principal attributed their success to the support, coaching, guidance, and experiences created by their former principal. The principals admitted that the role of the assistant principal alone was not enough to prepare them for the work as a principal and that the single most important factor was their previous principal.

This case study brought to light the importance of support for assistant principals in their current position and as they prepare for the principalship. As described in the literature review the role of the assistant principal was undefined and varied from school to school, and even across districts. The assistant principals interviewed agreed that they were unsure of their position as and how it related to the job of a principal. The assistant principals noted the need for support to guide their work and goals. The assistant principals interviewed in this case study all had aspirations to become a principal and were able to speak to the pathway from one position to the next with dedicated involvement.

The findings from both the assistant principal and the principal determined that the single most influential piece to the support and preparation for the principalship comes from the current sitting principal. A strong principal that was confident in the role and able to coach others, led to
a greater understanding of and preparation for the principalship. In evaluating each of the themes in this case study under the lens of principal support, the implications for this research show that growth was needed for principals in preparing assistant principals.

In terms of evaluation, the LKES tool is required by all school leaders in the state. It was agreed that this tool may not be relevant to the work that an assistant principal does each day. In order for this tool to be an effective evaluation measure, the principal should use it as a coaching tool with the assistant principals. Focusing on standards where the assistant principal needs growth or exposure would create an environment where the assistant principal was getting the experience needed to prepare for the principal role. One suggestion would be that the principal focus on a few areas at a time with each assistant principal and once proficient in those areas, the assistant principal would begin to work on others. Finding opportunities where the assistant principal can assume a different role and gain understanding of the principalship, was crucial in the preparation. The principals that commented on this, noted that their previous principal had provided that for them and that they now felt a sense of responsibility in coaching their assistant principals. This tool should be used to identify the exact areas in which the assistant principal need exposure.

The application and principal selection process was part of this theme and each respondent was passionate in the commentary about it. The common notion felt by respondents was that it was not widely understood what the district was looking for and how to transfer daily knowledge, responsibilities, and abilities into a successful interview. Support from the principal as well as district leaders, in this process was discussed as minimal in preparation for the interviews but considered to be valuable by all respondents. The principal selection process was also described as subjective and prescribed. Some respondents felt that the decisions were made
prior to the process beginning and that their current work was invalidated immediately. Suggestions included the need for constant and relevant support from district personnel as well principals in guiding the experience needed to be a principal. Job embedded questions or an observation day with an assistant principal would be beneficial into viewing the candidate more in-depth versus an interview situation. Other suggestions include the need for the district to define the roles of the assistant principal and principal and provide support to assistant principal in their preparation and to principal in coaching for leadership.

Instructional leadership was a concept noted by respondents and the main idea around this theme was that the principal decided the definition of it within each building. All principals commented that the role of the principal has changed to become more instructionally focused. Some principals believed that it was a shared responsibility and delegated parts to assistant principals and other leaders in the building to cooperatively work on. Other principals believed that they were the instructional leader and had to model and coach others in the building. Assistant principals were also divided on this topic. Some saw it as a shared responsibility and other saw it as a piece that should be led by the principal. All assistant principals agreed that this was an area they were not able to devote time. Suggestions for districts would be to define instructional leadership, who is an instructional leader, and help principals coach the assistant principals in this area.

Preparation was the biggest area of findings and incorporated several sub themes. College and university preparation was typically the first discussed in this area. Most respondents were appreciative of the experience of pursuing graduate degrees but felt programs were focused on theory and not practice. Colleges and universities that incorporated the cohort model and used performance based assignments received the most favorable comments. However, all
respondents felt that there was really no way to prepare for the role of a principal or assistant principal in a graduate school classroom or by doing work/research. Some respondents suggested that the only way to truly get the experience is to participate in job embedded training. An internship or mentorship was mentioned with all principal respondents and four of the assistant principal respondents. Colleges and universities should pair with districts to provide specific job embedded experiences for the assistant principals and principals to prepare leaders.

District preparation initiatives were also mentioned. One respondent noted that a college or university can do as much as they can to prepare and “school” you in leadership but each district will have different expectations. Therefore, there was high value in preparation for leadership within a district. Several older models of this in the researched district were mentioned by respondents, as they had participated in it or had experience with it. The older models discussed included an internship or job shadowing/mentor component, and respondents felt that made the experience worthwhile and relevant. Other preparation comments were centered on current initiatives to build leaders within the learning communities. Almost all respondents felt that the district was not consistent in the message and quality of support within the different learning communities. Respondents described the current efforts as ineffective. The location of an assistant principal impacted the amount of support given. In addition, differentiating the support was a recommendation for improvement. Each assistant principal has a certain skill set and a “sage on the stage” training or “book study” was described as not relevant and lacked opportunities for experiences for some to learn. However, all respondents believed that this was where support from the principal was crucial. Identifying building leaders and providing opportunities outside of the building was important for growth and development.
The definition and characterization of the role was important and influential in preparation. All respondents noted a variety of different tasks and responsibilities given to the assistant principal. While the exact definition or expectations of an assistant principal remain unclear, the respondents agreed that it was the responsibility of the principal to help define the role and find those opportunities for growth. Only allowing an assistant principal to complete managerial tasks does is not preparation for the role of a principal. Therefore, it is imperative that the role of the principal be defined as a leadership coach for the assistant principal. Principals must receive direction and coaching from the district in how to create those opportunities for their assistant principals. Collaborating with other principals will also help acknowledge what opportunities can be given or created to help support assistant principals.

When principals were asked to describe the difference between their role and that of an assistant principal and the notion of “bigger picture” kept emerging. Principals expressed that their job was much bigger than a checklist many unfamiliar responsibilities as a new principal. Navigating the political scene, managing people, and leading initiatives were cited as key changes in the roles. The principal must be able to think about the future and plan for it, while the assistant principal was thinking more about the current immediate tasks. In order to be ready for the transition, assistant principals must receive coaching and experience in issues that require them to think about long term planning. Therefore, principals must provide opportunities for assistant principals to be part of the decision making or visioning process.

Each theme within the findings center back to the importance of the principal in preparing assistant principals for the principalship. The assistant principal respondents in this case study were demanding that principals assume the responsibility of preparation. In addition those stakeholders that support principals, must provide principals with professional learning on
coaching others along with the expectations develop their assistant principals and other leaders. Colleges and universities should also be purposeful in the preparation of principals to include a portion on coaching and preparing others. Additionally, the state should provide guidance and suggestions about how to use the LKES evaluation as a coaching tool in preparing for the principalship.

The majority of the respondents believed that the responsibility for leadership preparation fell on the districts. Districts should be purposeful in guiding and teaching principals how to prepare assistant principals. Districts should be clear in the expectations of principals in this development and how to define each role. A clear explanation of the district’s instructional leadership design should be made available as well as expectations for implementation within individual school buildings. The districts should provide opportunities for development of and support for assistant principals. Relevant experiences and coaching should be available to assistant principals. Additionally, clear expectations for the principal selection process is also critical for preparation of the assistant principal.

The assistant principal also bears responsibility for growth and development. Assistant principals must set their goals and be clear about their aspirations. They must seek new opportunities, as well, and continue to grow as a leader. Assistant principals aspiring to be a principal must “lead up” when possible and try to carve out those experiences that develop an understanding of the principalship.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This case study analyzed the pathway from assistant principal to the principalship. It evaluated the preparation of leaders in this pathway and the different factors that impact the success
in the transition. This research set the stage for additional studies in school based leadership pathways and preparation for them.

One suggested topic for future research would be in the pathway from teacher to building leader. It could analyze the similar concepts of this study but focus on this different pathway. Examining how we prepare teachers to become school building leaders and evaluating the success of the transition would be interesting research to district and school leaders.

Another topic for future research would be evaluating district specific principal preparation programs. Similar programs in other districts were mentioned by respondents in this study but investigating the structure and determining the success rate of these programs would be important to understanding how we prepare school leaders.

A final suggestion for future research involves the district providing guidance to principals in training and preparing assistant principals for the role of the principal. Developing programs or coaching for principals to guide the assistant principals in relevant work.

**Conclusion**

When I started to develop this study, I was concerned about the lack of research that had been focused on the assistant principal. I wondered how a position present in all of our schools received such little empirical research. In designing the research methods I became encouraged by current lived experiences and translating the findings to a larger population. I realized that the lack of research may be the reason why research like this would was important.

During the interview process, I realized this research would be impactful. The singular topic of preparation for the principalship brought about true passion and emotion in all of the respondents. In almost all cases, I felt as though I was listening to a story that the respondent had been waiting to tell. The respondents body language, voice inflection, and even tears told me that
that the passion around the role of an assistant principal and principal made this research important and relevant.

Looking back at what the research shows in terms of the importance in developing leaders, it is evident that in order to be successful in retaining principals, detailed efforts must be made to coach assistant principals and principals. Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei (2003) noted that attracting an adequate number of high-quality candidates to the position of principal is a concern for many school systems. The assistant principal has long been known as the precursor position to the principalship (Denmark & Davis, 2000). Educational research is beginning to emerge surrounding the notion that assistant principals are often hesitant to become principals (Glanz, 2004; Weller & Weller, 2002). Marshall and Hooley (2006) concluded in their research that sitting assistant principals who aspire to be principals are more satisfied with their current work responsibilities than those assistant principals who are hesitant to move into a principalship position. The discrepancy in job satisfaction and aspiration lies in the perception between the actual and ideal work responsibilities of the assistant principal (Glanz 2004; Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004). Cranston, et al. (2004) concluded that there was a significant difference between what the assistant principals believed they should be spending their time on and the actual tasks they were completing within their work day.

In order to guarantee that districts are building their “bench” of leaders a more definitive understanding of the roles, definition of responsibilities, and focused initiatives on coaching others needs to be a priority. The four themes; evaluation, instructional leadership, preparation, and roles/responsibilities, within this study should provide a framework for this work at a district level. I hope this research influences changes for preparation of assistant principals and defines what the pathway to success looks like.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER FROM KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY
Abigail May

RE: Your application dated 3/3/2016, Study #16-348: The Assistant Principal Position as Preparation for the Principalship

Dear Ms. May:

Your application for the new study listed above has been administratively reviewed. This study qualifies as exempt from continuing review under DHHS (OHRP) Title 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) - educational tests, surveys, interviews, public observations. The consent procedures described in your application are in effect. You are free to conduct your study.

Please note that all proposed revisions to an exempt study require IRB review prior to implementation to ensure that the study continues to fall within an exempted category of research. A copy of revised documents with a description of planned changes should be submitted to irb@kennesaw.edu for review and approval by the IRB.

Thank you for keeping the board informed of your activities. Contact the IRB at irb@kennesaw.edu or at (470) 578-2268 if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.
KSU Institutional Review Board Chair and Director

cc: mchand18@kennesaw.edu
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER FROM SYSTEM
April 1, 2016

Dear Ms. May:

Your request to conduct the research study “The Assistant Principal Position as Preparation for the Principalship” has been approved. Enclosed is a copy of the Research Agreement. Please note that while this approval permits you to approach individual schools and/or teachers within the Fulton County School system, the final decision regarding participation is a local option and rests with each school principal and teacher. A copy of this letter must be provided to schools along with any correspondence requesting participation in this study.

No identification of Fulton County Schools (students’ names, teachers’ names, administrators’ names, etc.) is to be included in data collected as a part of this study. Also, complete confidentiality of records must be maintained. Please remember to send a summary report once the study is complete to the address below. If any additional information or assistance is needed, please feel free to reach us at fcsresearch@fultonschools.org.

We appreciate your interest in conducting research with Fulton County Schools.
APPENDIX C

EMAIL REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION
Hello,

My name is Abby May and I am a doctoral candidate at Kennesaw State University. I am conducting a research study about leadership, specifically addressing the Assistant Principal position as a pathway to the Principalship. My research is directly in line with the strategic plan here in Fulton County and will provide insight into our leadership pipeline.

Your name was given to me by your Area Executive Director as someone who would be perfect for this research. I am emailing to ask if you would be willing to participate in a 30 minute interview for this research project. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be anonymous.

If you are interested, please reply as soon as possible so that we may schedule a time to interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, please email me.

Thank you for your time.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY
**Research Project: The Assistant Principal Position as Preparation for the Principalship**

Date ________________

Time ________________

Location ________________

Interviewer _______________________________________________________________________________

Interviewee _______________________________________________________________________________

Release form signed? ____

Demographic survey completed? ____

**Notes to interviewee:**

Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research and in helping grow all of our professional practice.

Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed.

Approximate length of interview: The demographic survey should take no more than ten minutes to complete. Interviews should last between 30-45 minutes.

**Purpose of research:**

This phenomenological case study will address one main research question related to the intellectual goals of the study;

1) Does the assistant principal position prepare candidates for the principalship?
Additional questions to be explored relate directly to the practical goals of the case study:

a) To what extent do assistant principals view their position as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?

b) To what extent do principals view the position of the assistant principal as preparation for the principalship within a large metropolitan school district in the southeast?

Methods of disseminating results:

Interview responses will be coded and added to the responses gathered from all participants. Themes will be identified and conclusions will be drawn to determine the overall findings in the study.

Interview Questions:

The phenomenological question asked to Principals - “Do you feel/believe that your position as an assistant principal was a pathway to the principalship?”

The question asked to Assistant Principals - “Describe your current positions as it relates to preparation for the principalship.”

The interview is designed to take 30 -45 minutes.

Response from Interviewee:

Responses will be recorded on audio file and transcribed using Dragon Dictation. Data and codebooks will be stored digitally on password protected computer only by the researcher listed on this IRB and any identifying information existing in hard copy or on flash drive will be stored in a secure data file. All information will be retained for a minimum of three years. Audio will be used and will be stored on the password protected computer of the researcher listed on this IRB and will be retained for a minimum of three years.

Reflection by Interviewer

- Closure
  - Thank you to interviewee
  - reassure confidentiality
  - ask permission to follow-up
Research Project: The Assistant Principal Position as Preparation for the Principalship

The following questions will help to create a better understanding of the participants in this research project. This information is key in making connections to help draw conclusions about the purpose of the research. All identifiers will be removed in the findings section of the project as to maintain confidentiality.

**Demographic Survey**

**Personal Characteristics**

- **Sex**
  - Male
  - Female

- **Race**
  - American Indian or Alaska Native
  - Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - Asian or Asian American
  - Black or African American
  - Hispanic or Latino
  - Non-Hispanic White

- **Age**
  - 25 to 34 years
  - 35 to 44 years
  - 45 to 54 years
  - 55 to 64 years
  - Age 65 or older

- **Years served as an assistant principal**
  - 1-3
  - 4-9
  - 10-15
  - 16-20
  - 20+

- **Years served as a principal**
  - 1-3
  - 4-9
  - 10-15
  - 16-20
  - 20+
  - N/A

- **Years served at the current school assignment**
  - 1-3
  - 4-9
  - 10-15
Aspects of Your School -

- **Level:**
  - Elementary
  - Middle
  - High

- **School context:**
  - Urban
  - Suburban
  - Rural

- **Approximate percentage of students who receive free and reduced lunch**
  - 0-5%
  - 6-10%
  - 11-15%
  - 16-20%
  - 21-25%
  - 26-35%
  - 36-50%
  - 50-69%
  - 70%+

- **Predominant racial composition of the school**
  - American Indian or Alaska Native - ________
  - Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander - ________
  - Asian or Asian American - ________
  - Black or African American - ________
  - Hispanic or Latino - ________
  - Non-Hispanic White - ________

- **Rate the quality of the facility at current assignment:**
  - Superior
  - Good
  - Fair
  - Poor

- **Rate the quality of resource support from the district:**
  - Superior
  - Good
  - Fair
  - Poor

- **Rate the quality of support from the Area Superintendent in your learning community:**
  - Superior
  - Good
  - Fair
  - Poor
• Rate the quality of support from the Area Executive Director in your learning community:
  o Superior
  o Good
  o Fair
  o Poor

• Rate the quality of support from the teachers in your building:
  o Superior
  o Good
  o Fair
  o Poor

• Rate the quality of support from the support staff in your building:
  o Superior
  o Good
  o Fair
  o Poor

• Rate the quality of support from the parents in your community:
  o Superior
  o Good
  o Fair
  o Poor

• Rate the quality of support from students in your building:
  o Superior
  o Good
  o Fair
  o Poor

---

**Personal Preparation**

1. Describe the quality of your formal preparation for the principalship (if applicable).
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

2. Describe the quality of your formal preparation for the assistant principalship (if applicable).
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
3. Would you become a principal today if you had the chance to begin your career again (if applicable)?
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Would you become an assistant principal today if you had the chance to begin your career again (if applicable)?
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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APPENDIX E

SIGNED CONSENT FORM
Title of Research Study: The Assistant Principal Position as Preparation for the Principalship

Researcher’s Contact Information: Abby May, 770.634.7623, amay7@kennesaw.edu or maya@fultonschools.org

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Abby May of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project

The purpose of the study is to determine if the position of the assistant principal is an effective pathway to the principalship and to examine both the position of the principal and assistant principal, the links between their actual and ideal responsibilities, and the accountability measures of each as related to preparation for the principalship. The study will analyze the leadership preparation, responsibilities, and evaluation of the assistant principal. Glanz (2004) described the assistant principal as underutilized and tagged that role as the “forgotten man” (p.283). Additionally, the professional literature includes little examination of the position of the assistant principal (Glanz, 2004). This study will include details on the position of the principal as it is the next typical career step for assistant principals. It should be noted that not all assistant principals aspire to become principals, but this study will focus on those that do. Providing specifics on the responsibilities of a principal illustrates the position of the assistant principal in preparation for the principalship.

Explanation of Procedures

The main data gathering activity included in this research will be interviews. Interviews will be conducted in person, over the phone, or via Skype or FaceTime. The participants will decide how they would prefer to be interviewed. Demographic data will also be collected and include questions about time in your current position, a description of preparation for leadership, and the support you receive in your current position.

Time Required

The demographic survey should take no more than ten minutes to complete. Interviews should last between 30-45 minutes.
Risks or Discomforts

Minimal risks will be involved in participating in this research. The study is qualitative and will include direct quotes and references to comments made during interviews. You have been selected by your Area Superintendent and/or your Area Executive Director to participate in this study. That being said, your responses will be stripped of as many identifiers as possible to protect your confidentiality.

Benefits

Your participation will allow you to express your opinions and viewpoints on the position of the assistant principal, it will add individual and unique perspectives and is critical to the research.

Additionally, the results of this study will aim to improve the position of the assistant principal. The research has implications for school districts and state educational systems in terms of preparing assistant principals for the principalship. This research could provide insight with regard to the transition from assistant principal to principal and how to define, evaluate, and support both roles. Educational leadership programs can also benefit from this research. The findings could impact how they structure their preparation programs for school leaders. Additionally, individual school leaders will find this research beneficial. Both assistant principals and principals can find critical information about how roles and responsibilities along with evaluations impact the transition.

Compensation

No compensation will be given for participation.

Confidentiality

In order to maintain your confidential participation in this study the following measures will be taken.

- All data collected that includes identifying characteristics (such as name or current school) will be stripped of identifiers prior to publication of report for the district or other scholarly publication. The original documents with identifying characteristics will be stored on a flash drive that is stored in a locked file cabinet that can be accessed only by the researcher.
- The researcher will store data on her password-protected laptop and will only save it on a flash drive in a locked file cabinet that can be accessed only by the researcher. Any data analysis will be done on the same computer until the researcher inputs into the program, Atlas.ti - which is also secure.
- Data and codebooks will be stored digitally on password protected computer only by the researcher and any identifying information existing in hard copy or on flash drive will be stored in
a secure data file in a locked file cabinet that can be accessed only by the researcher. All information will be retained for a minimum of three years.

- Audio will be used and will be stored on the password protected computer of the researcher listed on this IRB and will be retained for a minimum of three years.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation

Participation in this research study will be based on recommendations from your Area Superintendent and Area Executive Director. Participants included within this research will be sitting assistant principals who have an interest in becoming a principal and principals, of various tenures, who are willing to share their experience as an assistant principal.

Signed Consent

I agree and give my consent to participate in this research project. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

__________________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

___________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3403, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-2268.
APPENDIX F

DETAILED DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY DATA
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