The Forgotten Educator: Perceptions of Veteran Secondary Assistant Principals on the Principalship and Possible Promotion

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A Dissertation submitted to

The Faculty of
The Graduate School of Education and Human Development
of The George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education

May 20, 2018

Dissertation directed by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research to my loving wife, Andrea, and my two sons, Connor and Hayden. Without my family's support, encouragement, and patience this achievement would have not been attainable. You served as my motivation and my reasons for pursuing my doctorate. All of you have taught me to push myself to be a better man, husband, and father. Connor and Hayden, my hope is that, through this example, I have inspired you to believe that through perseverance and hard work your goals can be achieved.

Acknowledgments

I wish to use this page to acknowledge many of the individuals who supported and encouraged me along this journey. I am fortunate to have three knowledgeable and caring committee members whom I am honored to acknowledge. First, I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Jennifer Clayton, for encouraging me to finish what I started and pushing me when I needed it. I am grateful that you understood the struggle of finishing this doctoral program while trying to fulfill the requirements of being an assistant principal, husband, and father. Thank you for your patience, honesty, and guidance throughout the process. Dr. Alan Vaughan, I greatly appreciate your continuous support and encouragement. In particular, I thank him for his accessibility and willingness to assist me throughout this process. I must also pay particular thanks to Dr. James Tucker for volunteering his expertise on the subject matter and serving on my committee.

Lastly, my family deserves a huge amount of gratitude. I thank my parents who instilled in me the importance of education and self-motivation in order to achieve my goals. They always allowed me to dream big but kept me grounded, instilling in me the importance of hard work and dedication. Thank you for your endless support in all of my achievements. To my wife and sons, you provided me with the ongoing support and confidence needed to pursue my doctorate. It has been a long journey and I thank you for all your sacrifices. Finally, to my wife, you truly are the cornerstone to all of my success and endeavors. Thank you for everything you do to make our family better. I am truly blessed to have you in my life.

Abstract of Dissertation

The Forgotten Educator: Perceptions of the Veteran Secondary Assistant Principal on the Principalship and Possible Promotion

Literature on educational leadership is lacking representation of the assistant principalship. Many educators who choose to become assistant principals enter school administration with the desire to one day be promoted to the principalship. For many school administrators the assistant principalship is the first administrative position and is considered by some to be the training ground for the principalship. This basic qualitative research study examined the perceptions of current veteran secondary assistant principals as to why they have not applied for or been promoted to the principalship. This study took place in one school district in Virginia. With the use of purposeful and snowball sampling, 12 veteran secondary assistant principals answered a questionnaire and participated in two semi-structured interviews.

Themes materialized, and connections to the literature and theory were made. This study used Spillane's (2006) distributed leadership theory as a lens through which to view the data. Results of the study revealed five prevalent themes representing assistant principals' beliefs about their failure to apply for or ascend to the principalship: deterrents to the principalship; mistakes and missteps during the assistant principalship; school politics and impact on promotion; experiences needed for the principalship; and assistant principal development and the principalship. The assistant principals expressed their role as involving managerial tasks and being time consuming. Although they recognized the job of principal as being multifaceted and complex, these assistant principals expected the building principal to provide mentorship. They believed their

experiences as an assistant principal to be crucial to their development and identified the building principal as the primary source for providing these critical experiences.

Although they all entered the job of assistant principal with the desire to eventually become a principal, some of the assistant principals recognized they have some reservations about the principalship or no longer wish to be a principal. The study's results provided evidence that there are deterrents to the job of principal and influences that can impact assistant principal succession to the principalship. In addition, school districts have the responsibility to reconceptualize the role of the assistant principal to produce highly qualified candidates for the principalship.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Effective school leadership is critical with current accountability for student achievement. Increased demands and accountability for school leaders have triggered a change in leadership roles to include shared leadership. A distributed leadership model includes assistant principals in their shared duties and responsibilities with the administrative team. The assistant principal role, although often overlooked, is essential training for future principals (Glanz, 1994; Wong, 2009). For many, the assistant principalship is the first administrative position taken in the profession, yet there is a lack of research on the position compared to the principalship (Glanz, 1994; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Militello, Fusarelli, Mattingly, & Warren, 2015; Oleszewski, Shoho & Barnett, 2012; Wong, 2009). Glanz (2004) described the assistant principal as the "forgotten man" (p. 183) because there is little research on the assistant principal.

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), "The assistant principalship holds a critical position in education organizations for several reasons: First, it is a frequent entry-level position for administrative careers. Second, assistant principals maintain the norms and rules of the school culture" (p. 2). Thus, in school leadership, this new era requires individuals be well prepared to serve in the role of principal and who have served as assistant principals with the desire and training to move forward into the principalship. With the increased responsibility for student achievement in the United States public school system, a major concern for the assistant principal is to determine whether their role in the school gives them the opportunities to learn the role of instructional leader required when transitioning into the job of principal. According to

Wong (2009), handling administrative and management tasks are the role of the assistant principal as seen by the principal. The assistant principal is stereotypically someone viewed as a mentee being mentored by a principal. Wong (2009) stated, "In most of the principalship studies, the principal is the school leader and the vice-principal supports the principal as his/her assistant" (p.161). Questions regarding the role and responsibilities between the assistant principal position and adequate training for the principalship remain prominent questions in dealing with the supply of qualified principal candidates.

Teachers who decide to pursue a K-12 assistant principalship or administrative position might envision themselves as principals. However, some of these individuals never reach this goal. Some stay in the classroom as teachers, while others become assistant principals and stay in that role for the remainder of their career being referred to as career assistant principals. As previously stated, the position of assistant principal has been under researched (Glanz, 1994; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Wong, 2009). More specifically, there is a lack of research in regards to those who remain in the job of assistant principal and never become principal.

Statement of the Problem

It is apparent that the principal is a critical position in schools and there is a need to prepare individuals for this job. According to Militello et al. (2015), "The principalship is fundamentally important to the success or failure of a school, and by extension, the role of assistant principal is vital as well" (p. 195). The assistant principalship is often viewed as the training ground for the principalship, but research shows that a majority of the assistant principal's time is spent on student management tasks and not on instructional leadership (Glanz, 1994; Hausman, Neber, & McCreary, &

Donaldson, 2002; Kwan, 2009; Militello et al., 2015; Weller & Weller, 2002; Wong, 2009). In addition to the classroom teacher, the principal is one of the main factors influencing student achievement in schools (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Viadero, 2009; Wallace Foundation, 2013). One cannot find a universal definition of the job of assistant principal with defined roles because the definition changes from school district to school district and from school to school. Therefore, the aspiring principal candidate serving as assistant principal often succumb to performing tasks that have little importance in their preparation for the principalship (Glanz, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Kwan, 2009; Militello et al., 2015; Weller & Weller, 2002; Wong, 2009; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010).

The increase of distributed leadership practice in the school setting coincides with the increase of federal and state accountability measures. Principals alone cannot be expected to reach the accountability thresholds and maintain the responsibilities of the school. Distributed leadership provides a theory of leadership intended to capitalize the skills and expertise of the assistant principal. Distributed leadership also purposes the possibility of every member of the organization taking on a leadership role. Spillane (2006) noted that school leaders inherit tools and routines, but daily administrative-related work offers insight into the practice of leadership being co-performed or co-existing. Considering these beliefs on school leadership, any restructuring of the role of assistant principal must be based upon various factors such as existing organizational structures, relationships with stakeholders, general flexibility, educational reform, as well as the evolving professional role.

Distributed leadership is not without its own issues. Principals can be reluctant to share power with others, citing accountability measures from stakeholders. Others cite the time needed to build other's leadership skills as a deterrent. In addition, principals can confuse distributed leadership with delegation of leadership. Furthermore, principals may be concerned that other individuals may perform better and it will reflect poorly upon them.

There are factors that can impact an assistant principal's climb to the position of principal. Thompson (2010) argued that districts should have career planning for assistant principals to improve school succession. Assistant principals need to map out their future and goals. This can start with assistant principals participating in areas that they feel deficient such as tasks involving curriculum and instruction (Daresh, 2004). Hartley (2009) argued that there were three skills the assistant principal needed to master as an assistant principal to prepare for the principalship: being proactive, taking pride in managerial work, and working outside the office. Other researchers found it imperative that assistant principals be given opportunities to participate and practice tasks of the principalship (Militello et al., 2015; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010; Wong, 2009). Pounder and Crow (2005) postulated the importance of implementing shared leadership experiences for assistant principals that include instructional leadership activities. According to Militello et al. (2015), "The road to the principalship is clearly paved by experience as an assistant principal – especially for secondary administrators" (p. 195).

Purpose and Research Questions

There are factors that contribute to the decreasing numbers of qualified applicants seeking a principal position such as salary, stress, politics, and time commitment (Cranston, 2007; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). It is evident that the principal is a critical position and provides leadership in schools. As a result, schools must have a qualified and enthusiastic group of potential candidates who have the desire to fill the vacancies as they become open. Rarely does anyone ascend to the principalship before serving as an assistant principal at the secondary level (Glanz, 1994; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Militello et al., 2015). Thought to be a stepping stone to the principalship, Marshall and Hooley (2006) told us that approximately 40 to 50 percent of assistant principals go on to the position of principal. Research conducted by DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) proposed that principals rank their experience as an assistant principal (63.9%) as being the most valuable learning experience. As the assistant principalship often is a stepping stone to the principalship, it becomes critical to review this time and identify structures and relationships that properly prepare assistant principals to be promoted to principal.

The purpose of this study is to use distributed leadership theory to develop a detailed description of reasons why veteran assistant principals never ascend to the principalship from their experiences. This study fills a need in research literature by understanding the individual factors and characteristics that contribute to an assistant principal's aspiration for the principalship or desire to remain as a veteran assistant principal from the perspective of the assistant principal. The following questions guide this study:

1. What are the perceptions of veteran assistant principals as to why they have not ascended to the principalship or applied for a principalship (specifically reflecting on their past experiences, relationships, preparation, and events)?
2. What perceived leadership experiences within the scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to or limit ascension to the principalship?

Statement of Potential Significance

This study is significant to policymakers and practitioners for numerous reasons. First, assistant principals are essential to the academic success of the school; therefore, ensuring that assistant principals have the appropriate knowledge, training, and support is essential. An assistant principal's success is not only the assistant principal's responsibility but also the principal's and the district leaders'. Therefore, this study gives insight to those within leadership positions to support assistant principals in their growth as a school leader to better prepare them to one day become principals.

Second, this study will contribute to the knowledge about veteran secondary assistant principals; especially exploring whether the position of assistant principal is productive preparation for the position of building principal. Since limited studies on secondary assistant principals have been conducted there is a fundamental need to know more about the assistant principalship to determine whether it needs to be redefined or changed. In addition, working conditions of assistant principals vary depending on the school district, school, and more significantly, as defined by the management and supervisory ideals of the building principal. Therefore, the outcome of this study will

hopefully provide information about which experiences of the veteran assistant principal better prepare them for the role of principal.

Finally, this study provides those within central office administration a greater understanding of what the assistant principal is experiencing within this role and encourages central administration to provide resources, mentoring, and proper professional learning opportunities to increase the adequate number of principal candidates. If school systems value the role of the assistant principal as a learning and preparation period for aspiring principals, the time in the position can be used to more effectively groom potential principal candidates. Developing administrators ready to make the transition from assistant principal to principal is important in preserving the cultural norms and expectations of the school district. The outcomes of this study will hopefully provide information about which experiences of secondary assistant principals provide principals with a solid foundation for launching the assistant principal's work as building administrators.

Theoretical Framework

Distributed leadership is a growing concept in school settings, but little is known in regards to the distribution of leadership within the administrative team from the perspective of the assistant principal. Further, little is known about the impact of distributed leadership on preparing assistant principals for the role of principal. While principals may not directly refer to their leadership style as distributed, the tasks and responsibilities of an administrative team are shared. Spillane (2006) acknowledged the way leaders interact and share leadership responsibilities as collaborative, collective, or coordinated. Similarly, other researchers identified interaction as crucial to a distributed

perspective (Harris, 2003; Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Weller & Weller, 2002). A distributed leadership framework offers a lens to investigate the collaborative practices of an administrative team.

The assistant principal is becoming a critical source of research as more accountability measures are being placed on the building principal (Militello et al., 2015). Distributed leadership offers a theory of leadership designed to exemplify the strengths of the assistant principal. Furthermore, it brings attention to the increasing need to prepare assistant principals to inherit more leadership roles and spend less time on managerial tasks. Granting assistant principals leadership roles also better prepares them to attain the principalship, thus assisting to address the issue of viable principal candidates.

Summary of Methodology

A basic qualitative research study was conducted to see how veteran assistant principals interpreted their experiences and how it influenced the possibility of promotion to building principal (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research provides a framework for those to express their points of view, so others can understand and appreciate their experiences and interpretations of their environment (Patton, 2002). I focused on the meaning of being an assistant principal and the impact this role plays on preparing them to become principal.

This qualitative study was conducted within one school district in Virginia. This school district is a blend of rural and urban centers with approximately 39,000 students: 55% White, 35% Black, 4% Hispanic, 3% Asian, .03% American Indian/Alaska Native. Within the school district, 34% of students were identified as economically

disadvantaged. In addition, this school district did not meet all federal Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOS) for the 2016-2017 school year.

With the use of purposeful and snowball sampling, I focused on middle and high school veteran assistant principals who met the following criteria: (a) participants must have held the position of assistant principal for seven or more years, (b) participants must have been employed with the current school district for at least one year, and (c) participants must currently hold the position of assistant principal during the time of the study. Within the school district, there were a total of 61 secondary assistant principals and 22 veteran assistant principals who met the criteria. After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval as well as the school district's consent, I emailed participants, formally inviting them to participate in the study and explaining the study and their role. Purposeful and snowball sampling was used in order to have access to the maximum number of participants needed to complete the study. All the participants met the criteria and the number of participants did not exceed 20 participants; however, the data collection ceased once I reached the point of saturation.

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted. At the first interview, the participant gave verbal consent after which I provided each participant with a questionnaire that focused on background information and demographics. The document was completed and collected at the end of the first interview. The second interview was scheduled two weeks after the first interview, but it was based on the availability of the participant. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by a transcription service. Field notes were used during the interview process to assist with accurate data collection. In addition, member checking was utilized to ensure credibility. After the interviews

were transcribed and reviewed, interview transcriptions and field notes were analyzed and categories were created and refined during the coding process until themes emerged and connections to the literature and theory were made. All information was collected and stored safely throughout the entire process.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study involved the number of participants and the site. This study focused on the perspective of secondary veteran assistant principals within one Virginia school district. The school districted selected was chosen based on convenience and access to the researcher. Due to the utilization of purposeful sampling, only a select few were able to participate in this study. Furthermore, when collecting data within one school district, certain assertions or results cannot be used to make generalizations.

Limitations

This study relied on qualitative methods that have limitations. One limitation is my position as an assistant principal. Participants may have not felt comfortable or been completely honest about how they feel regarding reasons for remaining in the position of assistant principal. In order to create trustworthiness each participant was assigned a pseudonym and referred to by the pseudonym in the study. I was forthcoming with all participants and gained their confidence by keeping confidentiality throughout the study with the assigning of a pseudonym to each participant. The participants were involved in the transcription process and all findings were shared with them as well as a copy of their transcript. This hopefully created an atmosphere of trust allowing them to be forthcoming with their answers.

Definition of Key Terms

This study requires the use of specific vocabulary. To assist the reader, the following terms are defined:

Assistant principal or Vice principal. The entry-level position and often the first formal administrative position that an individual holds without previous administrative experience (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 13).

Veteran assistant principal. Is operationally defined as an assistant principal who has served as an assistant principal for 7 or more years and has yet to move into the role of principal.

Distributed leadership. Distributed leadership is a perspective of collective interaction practice of formal and informal leaders, followers, and their situation. The tools and routines used in practice denote collaborative, collective, or co-coordinated distribution (Spillane, 2006, 3-4).

Duty(ies). Is operationally defined as a person, group, or organization responsibility, which is referenced within a conceptual area of an educational setting.

Principal. Is operationally defined as an individual holding the building level administrative position in which he/she supervises and facilitates the daily operations of the school and is characterized as the school leader.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The position of assistant principal is regarded as an important step in the journey to become a principal, but it is not as well researched as the principalship. Marshall and Hooley (2006) stated, "The assistant principal is often ignored and sometimes maligned" (p. vii). Similarly, Glanz (2004) postulated, "The forgotten man…is frequently the assistant principal. We know he is there but know little about him" (p.183). It is important to examine issues related to assistant principals who never ascend to the principalship because leadership is critical to school success; however, researchers have suggested that the position of principal is not one that is highly sought (Barty, Blackmore, Sachs, & Thomson (2005); Cranston, 2007; Kwan, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009; Schutte & Hackmann, 2006; Shen, Cooley, & Wegenke, 2004; Whitaker & Vogel, 2005; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). The review of literature reveals a shallow research base specifically as it relates to factors contributing to reasons for assistant principals never ascending to the principalship. As a result, a preponderance of studies reviewed were conducted in the past 15 years. A few older works that were considered formative or instrumental in the field were also included.

During the time frame of this literature review the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized in 1999, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed by President Bush in 2002, and Race to the Top was announced by President Obama in 2010; however, in discussing the principal's and assistant principal's roles, studies were retrieved beginning in the early 1990s. This literature search reviews various sources in which assistant principal was a key term. Included in the review is literature on the principalship, the assistant principalship, administrative preparation programs, career

path to the principalship, assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship, aspiring principals and career assistant principals. The terms *principal, vice principal, school administration, career path, administrative preparation programs, career assistant principal, aspiring principal* and *distributed leadership* were added to the term "assistant principal" using the Boolean "and" command. The literature search included the Google Scholar database, Education Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) database, dissertation and theses online, World Wide Web Internet searches, reference lists from articles, and books. All journal articles were peer reviewed. Overall, there is a lack of research on the perspectives of assistant principals.

The Principalship

The principal first appeared as the "principal teacher" who taught students while leading the school. This term was designated to place the importance on teaching for the school head. As schools became larger and began to educate more children, schools became complex organizations that required more than part-time leadership. Glanz (1994) stated that it was approximately 1920 when the principal teacher no longer taught classes and became the principal serving as a full-time administrator to deal with the managerial duties of the school.

Principals constitute the core of the leadership team in schools. In the current era of accountability due to high stakes testing created by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), leadership matters in schools as principals are being held accountable for their school's success (Rice, 2010). Principals play a vital role in setting the direction for school success and their knowledge is essential to leading the school (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). They are

expected to be instructional leaders, disciplinarians, mentors, assessment experts, budget analysts, property managers, community relations' experts, overseers of policy mandates and initiatives, and experts in school law. Their role can be complex, but their leadership is pivotal to the school's success (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Horong, Klasik, & Loeb, 2009; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Viadero, 2009).

Today, the role of principal is vast. The role of principal has grown to the point that it is too complex to define because of the many expectations, skills, and responsibilities that have become a part of the principalship (Catano & Stronge, 2007). The principal is responsible for everything that takes place in his or her school including adhering to all federal and state requirements. The demands of the federal government's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) influenced the Virginia Department of Education's (2012) *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Principals*, which were approved February, 2012:

> The *Code of Virginia* requires *(1)* that principal evaluations be consistent with the performance objectives (standards) set forth in the Board of Education's *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, Administrators, and Superintendents* and *(2)* the school board's procedures for evaluating principals and assistant principals address student academic progress. (p. 3)

The principals have seven performance standards that define the criteria expected when performing their duties: (1) instructional leadership (2) school climate (3) human resource management (4) organizational management (5) communication and community relations (6) professionalism and (7) student academic progress. Within these performance standards, principals have performance indicators which are observable behaviors that identify the level at which principals are meeting each standard.

Decisions made by the principal involve topics such as school safety, instruction, staff development, discipline, school budget and responding to "all the stuff that walks in the door" (Grubb & Flessa, 2006, p.519). He or she is held accountable for the decisions made daily by the superintendent, community, and parents. As the chief leader of the school, the principal must be knowledgeable and flexible to meet the changing needs of society.

According to the Wallace Foundation (2013), there has been an educational change that has impacted principals. Gone are the days when principals were more of a middle manager only responsible for managing people and the building. Instead, they find themselves responsible for a variety of outcomes. The principal's role has changed over the decades and as a result, the principalship has become more complex (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Wallace's work since 2000 suggested principals are now given the responsibilities of shaping a shared vision of academic success for all students; creating a positive climate for education; cultivating leadership in teachers; improving instruction; and managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. The Wallace Foundation (2013) stipulated that principals can no longer function simply as building managers, tasked with adhering to district rules, carrying out regulations, and avoiding mistakes. Twenty-first century principals must be instructional leaders capable of developing a team of teachers who deliver effective instruction to every student (p. 6).

The Wallace Foundation is considered a creditable source of information by many in the field. However, the Wallace Foundation (2013) does not state the source of their data for their research. The claims the researchers are making are not supported with

data. The researchers clearly state what they believe to be major changes to the principalship.

A study conducted by Horong, Klasik, and Loeb (2009) analyzed principal time use from principals within Miami-Dade County Public Schools and concluded that principals engage in 40 different types of tasks daily. The researchers had 65 principals self-report their time use and reduced any bias by the researchers conducting observations in the field. In this study, the researchers aggregated the principal's daily tasks into six task categories: administration, organization management, day-to-day instruction, instructional program, internal relations, and external relations. Their research revealed principals spend most of their time on administrative activities (27.46%). These tasks included such things as student discipline, managing student services, managing standardized tests, fulfilling compliance requirements, managing student attendance, supervising students, fulfilling special education requirements, and school scheduling. The second largest category was management tasks (20.95%), such as hiring personnel, managing the facility, managing budget and resources, managing non-instructional staff, networking with other principals, managing their personal schedule, maintaining campus facilities, developing and monitoring safe school environment, and dealing with concerns from teachers. The next largest category was internal relations (14.64%). This category included tasks such as developing relationships with students, communicating with parents, attending school activities, and interacting with staff about non-school related topics. The least amount of time was devoted to the following categories: instructional program (6.73%), day-to-day instruction (5.88%), and external relations (4.69%). The rest of the principal's time was devoted to tasks that did not fall into any of the categories

because they were considered "personal time" (p.503). Although this study was limited in scope because it focused on principals in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the changing role and the issues related with the role of principal is potentially more widespread.

According to Viadero (2009), principals are the second most important factor in student achievement. Historically, principals have been the manager and political person of the school, but now reforms require that the principals be the instructional leader (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). As the instructional leader in the building, the principal must follow all federal and state mandates. In an era of accountability in education, policy makers require new levels of academic achievement and the responsibility of meeting these demands falls on the desk of the school principal (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). With the passing of legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top, external pressure on schools in the United States to improve student achievement for all students has been increasing and educators are being held accountable for their instruction (Oleszewski et al., 2012). The principal's decisions revolving around recruitment, development, and retention of teachers impact instructional leadership (Harris, 2003).

In a study performed by Branch, Hanushek, and Rivikin (2013) that analyzed longitudinal data from the University of Texas at Dallas Texas School Project, it was found that a principal could improve the quality of instruction in a school by improving the quality of teachers through staff development. Their analysis focused on principals in elementary and middle schools from 1995 to 2001 because their study used student achievement data from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills for grades 3 through 8.

They observed 7,420 principals and included 28,147 annual principal observations in their data. Branch et al. (2013) concluded that highly effective principals raised the academic achievement of a student between two and seven months of instructional learning in a school year. The same study also showed that ineffective principals could decrease academic achievement by the same amount of time. Even though these impacts are smaller than those associated with highly effective teachers, principal quality has an impact on every student in the school. Using methods comparable to ones that measure teachers' "value-added" to student outcomes, the researchers applied this same calculation to the entire school. They discovered that teachers affect only their students in their classroom, while principals affect all students in a school. By estimating individual principal's contribution to growth in student achievement, they showed that the overall influence of increasing principal quality surpasses the benefit from a comparable increase in the quality of a single teacher (Branch et al., 2013).

Similarly, a longitudinal study of 22 primary schools in Cyprus conducted by Kythreotis, Pashiardis, and Kyriakides (2010) researched the principal's effectiveness on academic achievement. The researchers analyzed data of 1,224 primary students and assessed their achievements on Greek language and mathematics over a single school year. The researchers found that student achievement is related to the principal's human resource leadership style. Furthermore, they concluded that effective principals influence school climate by involving all stakeholders and building and sustaining trust. An effective principal is aware of the school climate and understands that he or she influences the climate of the school. According to Ibtesam (2005), creating an environment of collaboration with open communication is the most important factor for

school improvement. As the leader of the school, the principal must model the way for the staff and by doing so the school's culture and climate will reflect the actions of the principal (Ibtesam, 2005).

The Wallace Foundation has published various reports in order to make changes in school leadership by filling in gaps in educational literature. Since 2000, The Wallace Foundation and their researchers have identified various behaviors and characteristics necessary to become a successful principal. The Wallace Foundation (2012a) cited over a decade of research on identifying five key behaviors of an effective principal:

1. Shaping a vision for the school, its students and staff
2. Creating a school climate that is hospitable to education
3. Cultivating the leadership capabilities of others
4. Engaging in practices that improve instruction
5. Managing people, processes, and data

When principals implement these five behaviors in their schools, they have the ability to have a positive impact (Wallace Foundation, 2012a). Gordon and Crabtree (2006) concluded the following about successful principals:

> As with teachers, there is a widely held assumption that the primary criterion for excellence in the principal role is the right combination of knowledge and skills. To be sure, every principal must possess a great deal of knowledge and many skills these days, perhaps more of each than before. But the critical attributes that set truly outstanding principals apart from the rest stem from innate qualities like their beliefs, motivation, ways of relating, adaptability and orientation towards continuous improvement. These talents, combined with knowledge and skills, create strengths that lead to outstanding performance. (p.178)

New policies and legislation such as *NCLB* have made the challenging job of the principal even more challenging because of the yearly academic gains that must be made by all students (Brown, 2006). President Obama and the Secretary of Education, Arne

Duncan, introduced a new educational reform in 2009 called *Race to the Top.* The *Race to the Top* legislation created a competition requiring states to reform certain educational policies, such as performance standards for teachers and principals, complying with national standards, and promoting charter schools. State applications for funding were scored on selection criteria. The United States Department of Education (2010) identified the following criteria for the area of "Great Teachers and Leaders": improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance, ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals, providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals, providing effective support to teachers and principals, and improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs. Studies of high achieving schools continue to show a relationship between strong instructional leadership and high student achievement (Cranston, 2007; Grubb & Flessa, 2006). However, there are questions regarding the principal's ability to be an effective instructional leader due to the many managerial duties and various time demands that are now related to the principalship.

The job of principal includes a growing list of responsibilities (Cranston, 2007; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Horong et al., 2009; Viadero, 2009; Wallace Foundation, 2013), with state and federal legislation making the job of instructional leader the most important task (Branch et al., 2013; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Harris, Muijs, & Crawford, 2003; Kythreotis et al., 2010; Oleszewski et al., 2012). Various studies and researchers report knowledge or influence on instructional practices as a key component to becoming a successful principal (Wallace Foundation, 2012a). However, other studies conclude that the complexity of the job of principal does not allow for the allotment of time

towards the school's instructional needs (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Horong et al., 2009). The principal has always depended upon the assistant principal to assist with the managerial tasks in running the school and is now utilizing the assistant principal in other areas as well.

The Assistant Principalship

The assistant principalship is considered by some to be a gateway to upward mobility in school administration (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). While much is known about the job and role of the principal, the assistant principal role in educational leadership remains an area that is underrepresented in the professional literature (Oleszewski et al., 2012; Wong, 2009). Marshall and Hooley (2006) contended that the job of assistant principal and its inadequate sense of purpose and direction exists because the position is a narrative of stereotypes and thus, not sufficiently research-based. However, many consider the job of assistant principals as a steppingstone to the principalship as they are directly under the principal in the hierarchy of school leadership. The assistant principal is often more visible to the students than the principal, and therefore is often more influential in the student's daily school life (Glanz, 1994). Assistant principals interact with students daily because of the tasks they are assigned by the principal. These tasks can include student discipline, lunch duty, hallway supervision, classroom observation, and supervising school activities (Glanz, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Kwan, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Watson, 2005; Weller & Weller, 2002). Olesewski et al. (2012) concluded that with the increasing pressure and demands schools face to improve student performance, the role of assistant principal is imperative for school improvement.

Roles and responsibilities. Glanz (1994) stipulated that the first assistant principals were called "general supervisors". Their job included such tasks as collecting information, completing reports, coordinating special events, and performing other managerial duties. The general supervisors were to assist the principal with teacher evaluations and other logistical issues. According to Weller and Weller (2002), there is no universal role definition for the job of assistant principal. Oleszewski et al. (2012) postulated that the typical span of duties for assistant principals consist of student manager, instructional leader, and personnel manager.

In 1923, the Department of Elementary School Principal's Committee on Education Progress conducted a study on assistant principals by surveying 1,270 assistant principals. Although the duties and responsibilities were not clearly stated, this study revealed that classroom teaching, administration, and supervision were major responsibilities and duties of assistant principals (Glanz, 1994). Glanz (1994) conducted a survey of 164 New York City assistant principals to identify their current responsibilities. He discovered that actual duties ranked in order included student discipline, lunch duty, school scheduling, ordering textbooks, parental conferences, assemblies, administrative duties, articulation, evaluation of teachers, student attendance, emergency arrangements, instructional media services, counseling pupils, school clubs, assisting Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), formulating goals, staff development, faculty meetings, teacher training, instructional leadership, public relations, curriculum development, innovation and research, school budgeting, and teacher selection (Glanz, 1994). As a result of this research, Glanz (1994) called for the need to redefine the role

of the assistant principal to include instructional and curriculum development with less emphasis on administrative duties.

In today's schools, the job of assistant principal is multifaceted and instead of a specific job description, the common contractual phrase used for an assistant principal is "performing any and all duties assigned by a superior" (Weller & Weller, 2002, p. xiii). Marshall and Hooley (2006) described the conundrum for assistant principals,

> They have a great deal of responsibility but little discretion, and they are under constant scrutiny. As they seek satisfiers, they respond to pushes and pull from their specific school site, their sense from previous professional experience about what is important, and the school system's rewards and incentives. (p. 9)

As a result, an assistant principal's job description can differ between schools in the same district, as assigned by different principals, or from year-to-year.

Despite the unclear or defined job description, there are several duties or tasks traditionally performed by the assistant principal. According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the responsibilities of an assistant principal can be grouped into four categories: (1) conferencing with students and parents; (2) handling behavior problems; (3) developing the master schedule, registration and attendance; and (4) counseling students. A study soliciting responses from 118 assistant principals on the duties of assistant principals in Maine by Hausman et al. (2002) determined that the duties included seven dimensions: (1) student management, (2) instructional leadership, (3) personnel management, (4) interactions with education hierarchy, (5) professional development, (6) resource management, and (7) public relations.

Similarly, in a survey of 100 participating assistant principals from rural, suburban, and urban schools during the 2000 school year, Weller and Weller (2002)

presented a selection of job responsibilities and duties. The response rate for this survey was 68%, offering the reader a representable sample. Those percentages of responsibilities included:

1. Supervise students (98%)
2. Complete routine reports, enforce policy, and write grant proposals (92%)
3. Participate in the selection of teachers, department heads, and assistant principals (87%)
4. Evaluate teacher and staff personnel performance and provide remedial assistance (78%)
5. Coordinate and/or conduct staff development programs and mentoring or peer tutoring programs (62%)
6. Develop the school's master schedule (57%)
7. Coordinate and place student teachers and paraprofessionals (52%)
8. Prepare the school's budget (7%)
9. Act as the school's liaison to community and civic organizations (5%) (p.12).

In a more recent study, Kwan (2009) conducted a study of the roles of 331 assistant principals in Hong Kong secondary schools and categorized the roles into seven categories:

1. external communication and connection
2. quality assurance and accountability
3. teaching, learning and curriculum
4. staff management
5. resource management
6. leader and teacher growth and development
7. strategic direction and policy environment (p.202).

This study revealed that the roles remain relatively the same as they were years ago. The assistant principal continues to primarily be more of a building manager than an instructional leader. In this study, Kwan sent a questionnaire to 803 assistant principals in Hong Kong and had 41.2% participate in the study offering the reader a reliable sample.

In a British study, Watson (2005) presented three broad categories of roles assistant principals either currently served in or could serve in within primary schools. The three categories described in the study by Watson are quasi deputy headship, subordinate deputy headship, and niche assistant headship. In quasi deputy headships, the assistant principal shares some of the leadership responsibilities. Within the subordinate deputy headship, the assistant principal is senior management and below deputy headship. Niche assistant headship refers to an assistant principal position that addresses a specific need within the school, considered a specialist. This position is below a deputy headship within the school. Watson (2005) defined the niche assistant principal position as a position that is relevant for that particular school. These three categories offered by Watson (2005) describe the main areas of responsibility for assistant principals within a school.

With current accountability movements and high stakes testing, instructional leadership is considered a critical role. Some of the common duties related to instructional leadership include designing the vision, setting goals, coaching and evaluating teachers, creating the master schedule, managing curriculum and instructional programs, and using data to make decisions (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Calabrese (1991) argued that effective assistant principals recognize that instructional leadership is involved in discipline, staff development, supervision, student activities, programs, community relations, or curriculum development (p.54). However, many of these tasks are conducted by the principal or divided up amongst the assistant principals. Kwan (2009) discovered that assistant principals in Hong Kong spent little time on instructional leadership tasks. Similarly, a study by Hausman et al. (2002) of 125 assistant principals

in Maine, reported that they spent the least amount of time on instructional tasks. As Daresh (2004) explains,

> Many assistant principals take their first job as administrators fully aware of the fact that a major responsibility that will face them involves the need to discipline students. Some may look at this duty as something that is anything but desirable. But disciplining students is truly an instructional activity. (p. 38)

A quantitative study of 56 current assistant principals on the current and idealized roles of the assistant principal conducted by Militello et al. (2015) concluded that an assistant principal's current duties center on the areas of curriculum and instruction, discipline, monitoring and evaluation, communication, relationships, and visibility (p. 216). This study revolved around the questions of "what assistant principals do" and "what they desire to do in their current practice" (p.217). Militello et al. discovered that assistant principals are restricted in their jobs by managerial duties and must answer to their direct supervisor. Militello et al. stated, "Assistant principals are put in a precarious position to "do as they're told" (p.217). Current assistant principals idealized their involvement with curriculum and instruction as the most important responsibility. However, it was expressed that curriculum and instruction is a broad topic and difficult to be involved in all aspects.

Militello et al. clearly explain their study and offer demographic data for their participants. Their participants included assistant principals from elementary, middle, and high school levels. However, they lack explanation of their sampling and response rate for their survey. This study is useful for analyzing the perspective of assistant principal's current duties and idealized duties.

Several authors have noted the numerous roles assistant principals assume and the frustration involved with the lack of a defined job description (Glanz, 1994; Hausman et

al., 2002; Kwan, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Watson, 2005; Weller & Weller, 2002). The assistant principal role contains many grey areas and is often determined by the principal at each school causing many discrepancies between the job at schools. Assistant principals are challenged to fill many roles each day and have little to no say in the duties they must perform. Instead of a detailed job description, the common contractual phrase is "performing any and all duties assigned by a superior" (Weller & Weller, 2002, p. xiii).

Throughout educational literature, it is evident that researchers commonly view assistant principals as disciplinarians. Weller and Weller (2002) reported in their research that ninety-eight percent of the assistant principal's time was spent on student supervision. Glanz (1994) discovered that a majority of assistant principals in New York perceived their primary duties as student management tasks such as disciplining students. Similarly, assistant principals in Maine reported the majority of their job was dealing with student management tasks (Hausman et al., 2002). Furthermore, in Hong Kong, vice principals spent a vast amount of time dealing with student management items (Kwan, 2009). Table 1 summarizes the results of the previously described studies and others regarding the duties of assistant principals.

Table 1

Assistant Principal Duties

Author (year)	**Sample**	**Total Number of Duties**	**Assistant Principal Duties[a]**
Glanz (1994)	164 AP's New York	25	Student discipline Lunch duty School scheduling (coverages) Ordering Textbooks

			Parental conferences Assemblies Administrative duties Articulation Evaluation of teachers
Hausman et al. (2002)	118 AP's Maine	7	Student management Interacting with the education hierarchy Personnel management Public relations Professional development Instructional leadership Resource management
Weller & Weller (2002)	100 AP's	9	Supervise students Complete routine reports, enforce policy, and write proposals Participate in the selection of teachers, department heads, and assistant principals Evaluate teacher ad staff personnel performance and provide remedial assistance Coordinate and/or conduct staff development programs and mentoring or peer tutoring programs Develop the school's master schedule Coordinate and place student teachers and paraprofessionals Prepare the school's budget Act as the school's liaison to community and civic organizations
Kwan (2009)	331 Secondary AP's Hong Kong	7	Staff management Strategic direction and policy environment Quality assurance and accountability

	Teaching, learning, and curriculum
	External communication and connection
	Leader and teacher growth and development
	Resource management

[a]Only the top 10 duties are listed

Knowledge and skill. There are certain knowledge and skills associated with being an effective assistant principal. Weller and Weller (2002) conducted a survey of 100 practicing assistant principals from rural, suburban, and urban schools. When answering the survey, approximately 70% of those surveyed revealed the following for essential skills and knowledge for effective assistant principals: people skills, good communication skills, knowledge of leadership theory, techniques for improving curriculum and instruction, and ability to work with teams (p.25). The effectiveness of assistant principals depends on their ability to master and apply relevant leadership knowledge and skills (Weller & Weller, 2002).

The opportunity to possibly have an impact on instruction is welcomed by most assistant principals, but some find the daily tasks associated with the job leave them with little time to engage in any meaningful instructional leadership. This can leave a school lacking in quality leadership in critical areas of instructional supervision and improvement. Assistant principals report that the unpredictability of each day leaves them too busy managing the school to actually lead the school (NASSP, 2012).

Weller and Weller (2002) postulated four crucial components for assistant principals in developing a knowledge and skills base for instructional leadership: (1) active role in the evaluation of teachers; (2) become trouble shooters proactive in seeking

out potential problems and addressing them before they can negatively impact teaching and learning; (3) become experts at providing essential and timely classroom resources to teachers; and (4) creating and maintaining a climate, or ethos, promoting instructional leadership (pp.41-42). Neumerski (2013) suggested that the purpose of the instructional leadership skill set is tied to the central work of schools teaching and learning: "Thus, instructional leadership practice must include the connection between instructional leadership and instruction itself" (p.315). Many of the responsibilities of assistant principals focus on managerial tasks; it would appear challenging for assistant principals to obtain experience in instructional leadership that is demanded of principals.

The support assistant principals receive in their roles can be indicative of their future success. Chan, Webb, and Bowen (2003) surveyed 130 randomly selected assistant principals from elementary and secondary schools to discover how prepared assistant principals are for the principalship. They concluded that assistant principals lack the necessary on-the-job training needed to prepare them for the principalship and that the principals can play a substantial role in their development.

Mentoring. Mentorships for assistant principals are essential to their preparation due to the insight and experience they receive from their mentor. Wong (2009) reported from prior studies on the relationship between the principal and assistant principal and composed a framework to understand the working relationship between principal and assistant principal. Wong (2009) wrote:

> The three dimensions of the framework include (1) the management tasks and functions of the top two administrators, (2) the status of principals and vice-principals in terms of partners, chief assistant and mentor-learner, and (3) their roles as leaders and managers. (p.175)

Wong (2009) argued that these are important to know when re-examining the role of assistant principal and defining the relationship between principal and assistant principal. Daresh (2004) stated that having a mentor is "the single most powerful thing an assistant principal can do to enhance personal survival and effectiveness" (p. 97). The role the assistant principal has in a school depends upon how the principal perceives the role. The principal can improve the overall training and experience of the assistant principal by creating a partnership with the assistant principal (Paskey, 1989). Paskey (1989) argued the importance of the principal creating a co-principalship perspective; the principal shares all school duties with the assistant principal and offers the assistant principal the opportunity to experience everything. By creating a co-principalship environment, the principal serves as a mentor to the assistant principal, offering guidance to the assistant principal as he or she gains experience. Oleszewski et al. (2012) encourages assistant principals to engage in a mentoring relationship with their current principal because it should promote professional development and assist in more leadership opportunities.

According to Daresh (2004), mentoring has two practices. The first is the identification of proper mentors for aspiring or new principals. The mentor needs to devote time teaching the intern about policies and procedures as he or she offers support and feedback. The second process of mentoring explained by Daresh (2004) is the socialization development that occurs when an intern reflects about her or his leadership experiences with their mentor. The mentor guides the aspiring or new principal as he or she develop his or her belief systems and helps the new principal understand the commitment to the job of administrator by asking guiding questions. Lee et al. (2006) described approaches for the mentoring process. These approaches included ongoing

communication, planning, organization, and sharing professional knowledge. The authors also cited the importance of maintaining balance in the mentor and intern relationship. This balance has helped the mentor provide feedback to the intern through active listening and observation. The intern found the most efficient way to accomplish tasks is with the support of the mentor instead of simply completing simple tasks that could be done by an assistant.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) elaborated on the importance of mentoring when they indicated that assistant principals "need more than a job description" (p. 36). Moreover, Marshall and Hooley (2006) described the benefits of the role model/mentor professional development relationship as "acquiring the effective behaviors that best fit their own situations, abilities, and personalities" (p.36). Marshall and Hooley (2006) also cite the importance of effective mentoring of assistant principals. Benefits include expansion of understanding, self-confidence, and often, more opportunities to engage in nontraditional work assignments. A secure mentor relationship provides safety for the assistant principal to discuss solutions and gain skill in reframing issues.

A qualitative study on 16 principals from four school systems in the state of Georgia explored principal mentoring as a significant impact on principal preparation, socialization, development, and retention (Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengston, 2012). The researchers identified participants using purposive sampling and included current principals representing different schools, gender, and experience. All participants had been mentored and some reported as serving as mentors for assistant principals and teachers. Each participant participated in four semi-structured interviews. Researchers analyzed data from the interviews and artifacts gathered. The researchers identified

mentoring as a powerful strategy to prepare, socialize, and sustain principals (Parylo et al., 2012). This study discovered that different districts utilized various forms of mentoring that included informal and formal approaches with districts that used formal approaches having higher levels of satisfaction. The results from the study concluded mentoring as a form of professional development is needed by principals at all stages of their careers.

Zepeda, Bengston, and Parylo (2012) found both formal and informal mentoring to be associated with effective planning of principal succession. This qualitative study examined principal succession in planning and management in four Georgia school systems. The 32 participants of this study included the superintendent of each district; central office administrators; human resource directors; and school principals representing elementary, middle, and high school levels. The data was collected over a four month period through 32 semi-structured interviews and artifact collection. The researchers used a deductive analysis to review interview transcripts and documents. The researcher discovered that regardless of the type of mentoring program in the various districts, all participants believed that mentoring was an important part of a principal's success. In one school district participants described mentoring as, "not just telling you what you want to hear, but telling you and showing you things you need to hear" (Zepeda et al., 2012, p.147).

Reflection of a vice principal. Johnson (2004) described the day of a vice principal as if she was a participant of a qualitative study. She vividly describes her situation as, "Over the course of the past two years, I have often wondered what I have gotten myself into. But there is no turning back" (p. 32). She describes the job of vice

principal as including the roles of disciplinarian, teacher/staff supervisor, parent liaison, and generally any task not desired by the principal. Johnson explains that her schedule is overloaded and many unexpected situations arise throughout the day. Johnson (2004) concludes her reflection with a positive thought after receiving praise from a parent and her principal, "I think to myself that knowing I have really made a difference makes everything worthwhile. After all, I remind myself, I do work worth doing" (p. 34). Her reflection supports that idea that the job of vice principal is vast and complex.

Administrative Preparation Programs

Preparation programs for school principals developed out of the need to manage schools and oversee teachers (Berry & Beach, 2006). Recognizing the need for formal training, the first college-level course in the field was taught somewhere between 1879 and 1881. From 1890 to 1910, administrative courses in isolation transitioned to graduate degree programs. During these early years, university-based preparation programs were vague about the goals and purposes for their students (Levine, 2005).

Though the primary route to principal licensure, "training has failed to keep pace with the evolving role of principals" (Wallace Foundation, 2012b, p. 6). Current research on educational leadership has contended that fewer candidates will be willing or equipped to meet the challenge to serve as 21st-century leaders (Petzko, 2008). It is imperative for principal development to continue to progress as the role of principalship becomes more demanding and challenging.

McCarthy (2015) proposed in her research that educational leadership programs should be informed by the past but not bound by tradition (p. 416). Her research argues that educational leadership programs need to change to meet the needs of the next

generation of leaders by being open to different viewpoints and by questioning the traditions of the profession. According to Harris (2006), university preparation programs have been under examination and receive much of the blame for underperforming schools. The lack of proper preparation of school administrators is what many view as the root of low achieving schools. Obsolete management models and isolated theories in university programs are cited reasons for poorly prepared administrators. Fry, Bottoms, and O'Neill (2007) asserted that traditional university leadership preparation programs fail to provide leadership experiences with practical application components. Theory remains the key emphasis in coursework during university leadership preparation programs. Furthermore, university preparation programs fail to guide students in making connections between theory and practical application in the real school setting (Cibulka, 2009).

Principals surveyed by Murphy (2003) reported gaps between what they learned in principal preparation coursework and what they needed to be able to do their jobs. Only 68% of surveyed principals found their courses valuable, with practical courses such as school law, child and adolescent psychology, and instructional leadership in the top three most valued.

Levine (2005) conducted a 4-year study that found inadequacies in the way principals were educated. He surveyed principals, deans, faculty and alumni as well as analyzed case studies of 25 school leadership programs. Levine concluded that these educational leadership programs did not provide principals with the skills or knowledge needed to be successful. Specifically, 33 university courses initiated within university

leadership preparation programs had little connection to each other or applicability to the demands and expectations of current school principals.

Orr (2011) conducted a study that examined the experiences of educational leadership graduates while in a preparation program and after completion of the program. This study randomly selected 17 leadership programs in order to compare graduates' outcomes and best practices research among exemplary leadership preparation programs. Orr (2011) postulated that graduates were positive about their program quality and career as a result of the coursework.

Graduates rated three characteristics of the programs high as identified by Orr (2011). According to a study of 17 programs by Orr (2011), the participants rated veteran teachers with leadership experience, graduates who rate the learning experience as good, and valuable learning outcomes as three characteristics important to graduates. Orr's (2011) study discovered that instructional leadership focus is one area that was important to graduates in rating program qualities among the 17 programs examined in the study. Orr (2011) also suggested that there is a correlation between a preparation program and the outcomes of a program. Programs contribute to what graduates believe about being an administrator. According to Orr (2011), what graduates believe and learn about the principalship comes from features of their preparation program, and a correlation can be shown that suggests a connection between outcomes and program features. Graduates' beliefs in regards to the principalship are shaped by program features. Also, according to the author, an association exists between features and outcomes of preparation programs. The author also notes that programs focused on

instructional leadership, which deliver formidable internships, have graduates who rank their learning experience and the principalship as a career positively (Orr, 2011).

Aspiring Principals and Veteran Assistant Principals

In their study of assistant principals in Hong Kong secondary schools, Yu-kwong and Walker (2010) made the distinction between the career assistant and the aspiring principal. The aspiring principals are assistant principals who desire a principalship, while career assistant principals do not wish to move up the school system hierarchy. Yu-kwong & Walker (2010) found that assistant principals who desire to be a principal believed they could influence the school positively and affect school improvement, whereas the career assistant principals lacked this outlook. The authors also found that the aspiring principal outlook led to larger job satisfaction.

Yu-kwong & Walker (2010) make it clear that school districts need to prepare their aspiring principals in the assistant principal pool with opportunities to practice principal skills in the instructional leadership realm to give them needed experience and to prevent them from becoming career assistants. Thompson (2010) suggests assistant principal career planning can lead to a better school succession plan because people who consider themselves future principals will work toward gaining experiences to assume the principalship (p. 99). This suggests that the ideal situation for assistant principals is to prepare to become principal (Thompson, 2010; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010).

Pounder and Crow (2005) postulated that expanding the role of assistant principal to include instructional activities is a way to increase the number of principal candidates. Including assistant principals in instructional activities such as an analyzing test scores, leading professional development, and evaluating teachers assists in making the job more

attractive to those who wish to one day attain a principalship. Pounder and Crow (2005) recommend a model of shared leadership within the school, which would allow for the principal to increase the participation of assistant principals in instructional activities.

Lastly, assistant principals who desire to one day ascend to the principalship need to take an active role in pursing experiences in instructional task or other areas in which they feel they lack expertise (Daresh, 2004). Hartley (2009) postulated that there were three skills to master as an assistant principal desiring to be principal: being proactive, taking pride in managerial tasks, and working outside the office. First, by being properly prepared and implanting organizational skills, an assistant principal has the ability to be proactive. This will assist the assistant principal in recognizing future problems and developing preventable solutions. Second, by taking pride in assigned managerial tasks and completing them in a professional and timely manner, an assistant principal can earn the trust of the principal and be given other opportunities. Third, by working outside the office, the assistant principal takes the extra time after hours to complete tasks, which allows the assistant principal to free up time in his or her future schedule and be ready for what might come his or her way the following day (Hartley, 2009). Further, Hartley (2009) stated, "I encourage assistant principals to plan to go into each school day with instruction as their first priority and then play the hand that is dealt as the day unfolds (p. 28). However, studies show that a limited amount of assistant principals actually partake in the duties of instructional leader. For example, vice principals in Hong Kong indicated that they spend little to no time on teaching, learning, curriculum, professional development, or tasks associated with instructional leadership (Kwan & Walker, 2008).

Similarly, assistant principals in Maine spent a small portion of their day on instructional activities (Hausman et al., 2002).

Career Path to the Principalship

Many principals in twenty-first century schools have followed a similar career path going from assistant principal to principal (Glanz, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). While their time in each position may vary, traditionally, they have been a classroom teacher, served as an assistant principal, and then moved to the principalship. While this is not the circumstance for everyone, it is the presumed career path for many. The assumption is that experiences in the classroom will provide the principal with necessary knowledge of classroom instruction and the experience of assistant principal will provide the necessary leadership experience (Davis et al., 2005; Kwan, 2009). However, there are some reformers that advocate for the recruitment of individuals with strong leadership skills outside the field of education (Davis et al., 2005). This is the path less traveled, but it is becoming an alternative in this era of high stakes testing.

In order to become a public school administrator, an individual normally first becomes a certified teacher for a number of years. It is common in most cases, that the individual must have partaken in a university-based administrative preparation program, passed a principal certification exam, and possess a master's degree in K-12 educational administration or similar degree (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Whitaker &Vogel, 2005). These prerequisites can vary from state to state. One of the assumptions of this study is that a majority of assistant principals wanted to become a principal at some point in their career. A study by Chan et al. (2003) stated that 80% of assistant principals intended on becoming a principal at one time or another during their career. However,

assistant principals experiencing less job satisfaction are more likely to stay in their current position than aspire to the principalship (Chan, et al., 2003; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) conducted research on principals and assistant principals in the state of Virginia who believe the experience of assistant principal is invaluable. The survey had a 38% response rate with 1,543 participants. Of the 1,543 participants, experience as a teacher received the highest rating (64.6%). The respondents rated their experience as an assistant principal as a close second (63.9%). The principals considered graduate education (40%) and their principal internship (33%) to follow their roles as teacher and assistant principal. Another finding of the research reported that instructional leadership was the prominent area in need of improvement.

Turnbull, Riley, and MacFarlane (2015) conducted a study of six school districts concerned with their inability to produce school leaders. In New York, a district leader argued for the importance of cultivating teachers early in their careers and continuing to support them, as they become school leaders. A district leader in Denver concluded that the area they were weakest was career mapping and development strategies for assistant principals to become principals. Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) researched the issue of principal succession for the Southern Regional Education Board in *Who's Next: Let's Stop Gambling on School Performance and Plan for Principal Succession.* The study concluded that 18,000 principal vacancies exist per year and, furthermore, that most states have done little to prepare themselves for the large number of vacancies. Additionally, the study failed to report evidence that the state departments of education did not encourage districts to prepare either.

One of the key factors in assuring a pool of candidates will be determined by the motives and objectives of prospective building-level administrators, depending in large part on what candidates actually think about school leadership, and the principalship in particular (Cranston, 2007). Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) reported that accountability, professionalism, teamwork, trust, ownership, and transparency are all conditions of organizations that have successful succession planning for filling principal vacancies. Additionally, Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) suggested that school districts take an aggressive approach to attract highly qualified candidates for principal vacancies.

Perceptions of the Principalship

Traditionally, it has been assumed by those in education that individuals move into the job of assistant principal to one day become principal (Kwan, 2009; Kwan, 2013; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). This consigns the assistant principalship to a stepping stone position in the opinions of many educators. While the applicant pools for principal vacancies are decreasing nationally, researchers identify factors influencing those applicant pools. The factors influencing applicant pools for the principalship may have many descriptors. However, common themes can be identified, and these factors appear to be consistent throughout the research. The age profile of current principals is continuing to grow older (Cranston, 2007). The ever changing demands of school administration in terms of professional status, tasks, time demands, and accountability for student academic achievement are deterrents to pursuing a career in educational administration (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Negative views of the principalship are reported both in educational literature and mass media (Cranston, 2007). One perception

held by potential principal candidates is that one must be like "superman" to meet all the expectations of the job (Eckman, 2004). There is a lack of motivation resulting from the bureaucracy, excessive paper work, and lack of consistency (Cranston, 2007). Overall, the demands of the principalship have induced more stress on individuals and made the job less desirable.

Many times, it is the assistant principal who is witness to the increasing level of responsibilities and stress placed on building principals. According to a study on principals by Viadero (2009), "employment data from 1995 to 1998 concluded that the average tenure over that was 4.96 years for elementary, 4.48 years for middle school, and 3.38 years for high school principals" (p.14). Assistant principals are finding the principalship to be less attractive and therefore they are not applying for the job. Kwan's (2009) research identified that an assistant principal's sense of efficacy is the most important factor when deciding to apply for the principalship. His research also indicated that some assistant principals did not want to sacrifice the harmonious relationship they had developed with colleagues that they felt would dissipate once ascending to the principalship. If assistant principals find their work energizing and rewarding and believe that the stress and challenges of their job are well worth it, they will become more willing to apply for principal jobs (Kwan, 2009).

A study conducted on school principals in Australia by Barty et al. (2005) argued the principalship is not desirable to candidates because it has become too big of a job with a variety of demands coming from multiple constituencies. Many of the principals in the study voiced their regret that the job had become management oriented and the work was not centered on educational leadership. Their findings indicated that principals

perceived the job to have increasing levels of accountability with public demands growing for positive result on testing. Barty et al. (2005) discovered that many of the assistant principals stated, "they were there for the kids", which prevented many from trying to ascend to the principalship because it moves them farther away from daily interactions with the students (p.12).

Whitaker and Vogel (2005) surveyed 98 educators from a Rocky Mountain state who had completed a principal licensure program and had applied for administrative positions within a five-year period, 1998 to 2003. Data collection and analysis using mixed-methods and consisted of two parts: quantitative data collection and analysis and qualitative data and analysis. Quantitative data collection and analysis consisted of tabulating the survey responses using descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages then implementing chi-square analysis to determine differences amongst groups. Qualitative data collection and analysis consisted of including several open-ended questions on the survey to obtain perceptions of the participants and then analyzing the responses using themes and categories.

The majority of participants indicated that they had acquired or were actively pursuing administrative jobs. Respondents specified that 82% had applied for administrative positions while 59% were currently in the position of assistant principal or principal. Although the researchers recognized that the data collected was limited in scope, their findings revealed that age had an impact on whether or not participants applied for an assistant principalship or principalship and that higher percentage of males applied for positions (21%) as compared to females (14%), even though they are the minority gender in the profession. Factors contributing to participants applying for an

assistant principal or principalship also included ambition, salary, high-stakes accountability, and poor preparation.

Participants indicated that family obligation and commitments prevented them from desiring the principalship. Furthermore, 13% of the respondents stated that their future plans included leadership positions other than the principalship, while 11% said they would stay in their current job and another 11% stated they would pursue other K-12 leadership positions, excluding the principalship. Possible candidates find the stress and time requirement on the principalship to be too large of a deterrent to their families and personal lives. Whitaker and Vogel (2005) postulated that the job of assistant principal and principal might be more enticing to educators if they felt more appreciated and supported.

A quantitative study of 198 teachers, 306 principals, and 370 superintendents in the United States conducted by Shen et al. (2004) revealed eight issues influencing the application for the principlaship. Of these eight issues, workload and compensation issues were emphasized as disincentives for the job. Compensation of principals is often mentioned as a reason why there has been a decrease in the number of candidates applying for administrative positions. There has been some conversation proposing an increase in principal's salaries as way to attract candidates to apply for the position (Pijanowski et al., 2009). In a study conducted by Hancock and Bird (2008) who surveyed teachers about what prevented them from career advancement into the principalship, it was discovered that a small salary differential between teachers and administrators was one of several reasons why they did not apply for the position.

Pijanowski et al. (2009) confirmed principal salary as a deterrent for possible candidates when their study found the following:

> Concern about the longer hours required to do the job seem to be exacerbated by the perception that salaries have not kept up with the increasing demands of the principalship. Even when asked to compare leadership salaries to other positions in their own profession, 46% of current school administrators responded that their own salary increases are not as strong as teacher salary increases. (p.30)

Similarly, in a survey conducted by Cooley and Shen (2000), teachers were asked to rank 31 possible reasons that would influence their decision to apply or not apply for the job of principal in an urban setting; a lack of financial compensation ranked fifth.

Walker and Kwan (2009) conducted a survey on factors that contributed to attracting individuals to applying for secondary principal positions. This study involved 164 prospective principal candidates in Hong Kong, Tokyo. The researchers discovered three motives associated with the aspiration for assistant principals to pursue the principalship: autonomy and innovation, convenience and fit, and familiarity and status.

A 2012 phone survey of 1,000 U.S. public K-12 teachers and 500 principals examined the views of teachers and principals on the responsibilities and challenges facing school leaders. To inform the development of the survey, five public education leaders from different educational organizations participated in a 45 minute open-ended phone interview. This MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2013) revealed that three out of four K-12 public school principals perceive that the job has become too complex. One third of those participants said they are likely to leave the profession within the next five years, regardless of the school environment they work in. Furthermore, this study conducted for MetLife Incorporated by Harris Interactive, the majority of principals feel their responsibilities have changed greatly over the past five

years. Almost half of the principals surveyed stated they felt as if they were under a great amount of stress several days a week. Those surveyed indicated that job satisfaction has decreased significantly, from 68% indicating satisfaction with the job in 2008 to 59% in 2012 (Heitin, 2012). According to the survey, 83% of principals rated addressing individual student needs as challenging or very challenging, while 78% rated managing the budget and resources as challenging or very challenging. Principals also reported that dealing with parental problems and implementing the Common Core standards were significant challenges.

Job application is a strategic decision for anyone, where one reviews the benefits and the trade-offs pertaining to the job. The benefits and trade-offs of the principalship are factors that weigh on whether and assistant principal will apply for a principalship. Harris et al. (2003) postulated that any of the benefits of the principalship were not a trade-off for the long work hours, little job security, and potential invasion of personal life. Whitaker and Vogel (2002) proposed that the stress associated with holding the position of principal was a major reason deterring applicants from the job. Schutte and Hackmann (2006) concluded from a survey of 290 assistant principals that inadequate administrative skills, lack of personal experience, highly political position, and tremendous conflict associated with the position were factors negatively influencing individuals from applying for the principalship. According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), assistant principals' satisfaction with their current position was a determining factor in their decision to ascend to the job of principal. Job satisfaction is commonly considered an essential factor to those employed in any profession, including assistant principals and principals.

Nationally, principal recruitment is one of the most critical issues facing public schools today (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Combined with increasing responsibility and accountability demands being placed on principals in this era of high stakes testing making such roles more demanding and complex, there is a strong interest in a context of availability of a quality aspirant pool of candidates (Cranston, 2007). According to Howley, Andrianavio, and Perry (2005), school districts are finding it more challenging to recruit highly qualified new principals.

Theoretical Framework: Distributed Leadership Theory

The rise of distributed leadership practice in schools coincides with the rise of federal and state accountability measures leveled at addressing equity gaps. Principals alone could not be expected to meet the accountability measures and maintain school responsibilities. Leadership in educational literature has long been identified as a critical aspect in school improvement and is becoming even more crucial in the wake of school reforms, which has led to intensification in the roles and responsibilities pertaining to school leaders (Kwan, 2009). One general area that has emerged as an area of importance is distributed leadership in schools (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006). Spillane (2006) specified that, "The distributed perspective offers a particular way of thinking about leadership practice, arguing that practice gets defined in the interactions of leaders, followers, and their situation" (p. 89). It is frequently used as a synonym for democratic leadership, shared leadership, and collaborative leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Distributed leadership provides a lens for studying this "team" perspective within the administration level.

In the era of high stakes testing and accountability, school leadership is no longer just relegated to the principal but is instead extended to other personnel such as the assistant principal. Weller and Weller (2002) acknowledged that a shared leadership style would allow the assistant principal to act more as a co-principal and obtain more experience beneficial to the assistant principal's preparation for the principal's position. This leadership distribution has led assistant principals to take on additional responsibilities (Kwan, 2009). Distributed perspective by Spillane and Diamond (2007), stated "that efforts to understand the practice of leading and managing schools, we must pay close attention to the interactions, not simply the actions" (p.7). Leadership in schools is almost always distributed among administrators, teachers, and staff, rather than held exclusively by the principal (Spillane, 2006). In a distributive environment, a larger number of constituents in the organization have a stake in the accomplishments of the school (Harris, 2003).

Katz and Kahn (1978) argued that the leadership components transfer upwards from subordinates to the whole organization. They defined leadership as "the exercise of influence on organizationally relevant matters by any member of the organization noting that organizations are more likely to be effective when the leadership tasks are distributed" (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 571). The sharing of leadership functions results in a more effective use of human resources within the organization. The strategies Katz and Kahn imagined were that organizational leaders would use distributive forms of leadership through delegation and shared decision making that put into effect a general openness to subordinates' influence, and increasing conditions for sharing information. An important characteristic of distributed leadership views the study of leadership as

transformational, seeing leadership as the willingness and ability to empower others (Spillane, 2006). This type of leadership does not imply that everyone within an organization is a leader, but it allows for the possibility of more collective leadership (Harris, 2003).

Spillane (2006) contended that school leaders inherit tools and routines, but day-to-day administrative-related work provides insight into the practice of leadership being co-performed or co-existing. Distributive leadership implies interdependency rather than single leader dependency by leaders sharing responsibility with subordinates (Harris, 2003). With dwindling budgets, principals could employ the collective expertise of assistant principals and teacher leaders to provide viable professional development for one another and the school.

Assistant principals are seeking leadership roles that maximize their skillsets and talents to aid them as they ascend to the principalship. As principals take on more accountability issues, the need to distribute leadership becomes an important leadership task. The critical issue, according to Spillane (2006), is not that leadership is distributed, but how it is distributed. The concept of distributed leadership postulates that the job of school leader is primarily about recognizing and enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, in the process creating and enriching human capacity, or leadership density (Harris, 2003; Katz and Kahn, 1978; Kwan, 2009; Nguni et al., 2006; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Part of the job of principals is to mold and develop assistant principals to one day ascend to the principalship.

Summary

The literature presented demonstrates the need for analysis of factors that hinder assistant principals from ascending to the principalship. There are a number of factors that contribute to their success and their desires for career advancement. There is also evidence that suggests that assistant principals feel that promotion is not worth the time or the money. It is clear from research that the job of assistant principal lacks a defined role that would prepare all assistant principals for the principalship. The role of assistant principal can potentially be a valuable training arena for future principals, allowing them to experience a variety of responsibilities and circumstances. However, this potential is often unfulfilled because "too often, assistant principals are seen as uninteresting - as separate from instructional leadership in their mock-military discipline role and as people at the bottom rung of the administrative career ladder" (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 2). Yu-kwong and Walker (2010) postulated that school districts need to prepare their *aspiring principals* in the assistant principal pool with opportunities to practice principal skills in the instructional leadership realm to give them needed experience and to prevent them from becoming *veteran assistant principals*. Similarly, Oleszewski et al. (2012) also argued the importance of principal development programs that focus on developing future principals. Investing in the growth of assistant principals can ensure that districts are generating quality future principal applicants. As previously stated, the role of principal is extensively studied in educational literature, while the role of assistant principal is consistently overlooked (Hausman et al., 2002).

Chapter 3: Methodology

In an era of widespread educational reforms, the role of principal has continued to grow more complex making the workload insurmountable, causing the role of assistant principal to evolve (Kwan, 2011). The importance of leadership is now dire with current accountability for student achievement. Increased accountability for school leaders has triggered a change in school leadership roles to incorporate collaboration and distributed leadership. The assistant principal now is responsible for student discipline, managerial tasks, staff development, and curriculum leadership. It is the responsibilities of an assistant principal that can strengthen their confidence in meeting the expectations of their job and grow their aspirations for becoming a principal (Kwan, 2013). It is imperative during this time of educational reform, with growing accountability standards being applied to schools and administrators, to understand what motivates and deters qualified assistant principals to and from the principalship. Delving into assistant principals' thoughts, and perceptions through the interview process could assist educational leaders in understanding what motivates and deters individuals from the principalship and how to improve the professional development of assistant principals in order to better prepare them for the principalship.

Subjectivity Statement

There are concerns of high levels of subjectivity in qualitative research due to the primary instrument being the researcher. Smith (1990) stated "qualitative approaches do bring the researcher closer to the phenomenon under investigation and some might say too close" (p. 131). I need to be transparent with the reader about my biases that could impact the results.

In my experience as an educator, specifically serving as an assistant principal, I have encountered numerous assistant principals who have the experience and knowledge to become a principal but never attain a principalship. I have observed other colleagues climb the professional ladder from teacher to assistant principal to principal. In my conversations with various assistant principals across Virginia, where I have served as an assistant principal, I have yet to understand the motivations and deterrents of why some assistant principals remain veteran assistant principals and never ascend to the principalship. Reasons may include the inability to interview well, the lack of certain professional characteristics, major life event or issue, lack of a proper mentor, absence of desire to become principal, desire to remain an assistant principal, shortage of self-confidence, or lack of a specific skill or experience. While some motivators and deterrents have been identified, little qualitative research has been done on this topic. Therefore, this became a strong topic of interest for me, and I created a study to research this phenomenon.

Having been a classroom teacher in the same school district for eight years, an assistant principal for seven years at the middle and high school level, and serving as a summer school principal, I have experiences that have assisted in developing this research study. I bring knowledge of both the structure of public education and the role of assistant principal to this study. Though I have never experienced the continual inability to advance in my career, I have experienced the process of applying and interviewing for a principalship and the rejection of not receiving the position. This process did leave me with the feeling of rejection and caused me to do some self-reflection. I have also participated in the Aspiring Principal's Academy within my own

school district, which was established for assistant principals wishing to advance to the job of principal. I was also given the opportunity to serve as the summer school principal for middle school in my district. I believe this job assisted me in preparing me for a future principalship and allowed me to gain insight into the role of principal. As I am entering my seventh year as an assistant principal, I am considered an experienced administrator in my district, but I have yet to be defined as a career assistant principal by my peers. I have been given the opportunity to serve as an assistant principal in three different schools in my district. While serving as an assistant principal in each setting, the principal provided me mentoring and various opportunities to experience the duties of principal. The current superintendent in my school district does not believe in promoting an assistant principal to principal without serving as an administrator for five years. I entered administration with the desire to one day become a principal and have expressed that interest on my school district's career interest survey each year. Each day in my job as an assistant principal, I seek new learning experiences and am guided by the principal in my school. I have always questioned why one would decide to remain an assistant principal for their administrative career.

As a current assistant principal, I must earn the trust of participants, so they will honestly express their emotions and thoughts about their perceptions of why they did not ascend to the principalship. Researching assistant principals who hold the same position as me can serve as an advantage and disadvantage. As a researcher, I have much in common with the participants and will use that to my benefit to make them feel comfortable. I understand the school setting and the politics involved in schools, which will allow me greater access to schools, potential participants, and interviews. However,

being regarded as a peer may deter some individuals from participating in this study. It will be my responsibility as a researcher to ensure confidentiality of all participants in the study and establish trust with the interviewees.

Studies have discussed the assistant principal's roles and responsibilities (Calabrese, 1991; Glanz, 1994; Kwan, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Watson, 2005; Wong 2009), and have focused on the knowledge and skills associated with being an effective assistant principal (Neumerski, 2013; Weller & Weller, 2002). However, there needs to be more dialogue on why assistant principals who have held these roles and responsibilities and have the knowledge and skill set are not moving into the job of principal. In understanding what they are experiencing in their current role, answers need to be found to improve the quality and quantity of candidates for principal.

Epistemology

In this study, I sought to understand the varied experiences and perceptions of veteran assistant principals in a Virginia school district. Many of the principles that underlie the qualitative design also underlie the constructivist paradigm. The qualitative design and constructivist philosophy both utilize an inductive rather than deductive practice. My view of the world and environment that I live in is rooted in constructivism.

In a constructivist theory of learning, what is known and experienced builds knowledge. Constructivists believe that learning is founded on the premise that by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world around us. Dewey (1938) stated

> We always live at the same time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we

> prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation, which in the long run amounts to anything. (p.51)

Constructivists are interested in understanding the world of reality from the point of view of those who experienced it. Crotty (1998) stated, "What constructivism claims is that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (p.43). Researching through the constructivist lens allows me to ask participants questions that will give me insight into how they perceive and interact with their environment.

I concentrated on veteran middle school and high school assistant principals in only one Virginia school district. Another school district was invited, however, that district did not approve the study. The reasons are not clear why the district rejected my proposal but could be related to the social, cultural, and political context of veteran assistant principals. A basic qualitative approach allowed me to gain insights on assistant principals' perspectives of their role, skill and knowledge, relations, and how it has impacted the possibility of promotion to principal. This gave me the opportunity to reflect upon their needs and desires as a school leader and their impact on the school community. The role of assistant principal is vast and undefined in today's era of education. They have various roles they must manage along with gaining the necessary knowledge and experience to one day become principal. The job of assistant principal is demanding, and in order to assist assistant principals in becoming a principal, an in-depth look will be taken to understand how they perceive how they became veteran assistant principals.

Research Questions

The research questions stemmed from the idea that the job of assistant principal is indeed a stepping stone to becoming a principal. The role of assistant principal has become more complex as the job of principal has continued to evolve as education has moved towards high stakes testing. The principal is now considered the instructional leader of the school and must be informed of researched based instructional practices. In today's era of education, school leadership is no longer just regulated to the principal, but it is instead distributed to other personnel such as the assistant principal. There is a growing awareness of the importance the role and duties of an assistant principal plays in motivating or deterring and assistant principal for becoming principal. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of veteran assistant principals as to why they have not ascended to the principalship or applied for a principalship (specifically reflecting on their past experiences, relationships, preparation, and events)?
2. What perceived leadership experiences within the scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to or limit ascension to the principalship?

Research Procedures

Constructivists underline the importance of a preexisting conceptual structure that is used for understanding the environment and attaining higher levels of knowledge. Bentley and Watts (1994) stated,

> Constructivism is a philosophy and psychology about the way people make sense about the world. The central point is that people are always intellectually active - they do not learn passively, but go out of their way to try to make some meaning in what is taking place in their environment. Our constructions of life are conditioned and constrained by our experiences and this means that – since we all

> have different experiences – we are all likely to have different perceptions about ideas, actions, behaviors, incidents, situations, tasks, feelings, and so on. (p.8)

When people are given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, their true feelings and beliefs can be uncovered. Rich information can be yielded through interviews and open-ended questions, which enables participants to expound on their answers (Creswell, 2009). Through in-depth, and semi-structured interviews, I discovered the role various veteran secondary assistant principals play in their school environment and how they perceived their role as preparing them to become a principal. Because the role of assistant principals is a factor in principal preparation, it was imperative that I attained a better understanding of assistant principals' perception of their role as preparing them to become a principal. Assistant principals' tasks can vary from school to school because principals distribute these rules to assistant principals, and the role of assistant principal is continuously evolving in this era of increased accountability.

Methodology

Within a basic qualitative research study, "the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (Merriam, 2009, p.22). It is through basic qualitative research that individuals create meanings as they interrelate with their environment (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is unlike quantitative research as the data collected is in the form of words and expressions rather than numbers. Merriam (2009) stated, "all qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these

meanings" (p.24). Qualitative interviews are meant to connect the experiences of the participants with those who read the study by way of abundant, rich, in-depth details to understand and learn from the experiences of others. Merriam (2009) described, "Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p.88).

The researcher's role in qualitative research is essential because of the dependence the study has on the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Merriam (2009) argued that the researcher needs to be responsive and adaptive when collecting and analyzing data. She claims that the qualitative researcher is like a detective who at first uses all the evidence and then slowly shifts through it and patiently follows up with leads. Another required trait, according to Merriam (2009), is that the researcher must be sensitive to the environment, the data, and the analysis of the data. A final trait is for the researcher to communicate well with all participants. Merriam (2009) highlights the significance of listening, creating a rapport with participants, and the skill to write.

This study focused solely on veteran secondary assistant principals to understand what inhibits some assistant principals from attaining the job of principal. The goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its specific social and institutional context is essentially lost when textual data is quantified (Kwan, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Using two semi-structured interviews, assistant principals were given the opportunity to reflect and tell their stories, which provided the study with a detailed look into the participant, as well as his or her role. The thick and rich description

provided an essential window into all aspects of the participant as well as the role that brought insight into this phenomenon. Creswell (2009) stated, "In the entire qualitative research process, the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers press in the literature (p. 175). Understanding this occurrence not only raises awareness for others in educational leadership, but it also adds to the current literature in education. This research does not seek to establish reality, but as with constructionist, this research strives to construct knowledge about reality. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014):

> One major feature of well-collected qualitative data is that it focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what 'real life' is like" and how qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's lived experiences, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on events, processes, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them. (p.11)

This study took place within one school district in Virginia. This site was chosen because of the demographics and proximity to the researcher. Within this school district, there are 17 secondary schools with a total of 61 assistant principals. Using this site provided rich and descriptive data to the discussion of assistant principals not applying or ascending to the job of principal and becoming veteran assistant principals.

In my quest to better understand reasons for assistant principals never ascending to the principalship and becoming veteran assistant principals, it was important for me to interview individuals who fit my criteria of veteran assistant principals. Merriam (2009) stated, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). The participants for this study were chosen through

purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. I developed selection criteria that defined the attributes necessary for this study. For the purpose of this study, a veteran assistant principal was defined as an individual who currently held the position of assistant principal and had been in that capacity for seven or more years. The participant may have been an assistant principal in another school or school district. This ensured that the participants have experienced the various roles, responsibilities, and knowledge of an assistant principal. Secondly, the assistant principals currently held the position in a middle or high school in the selected school district in Virginia at the time of data collection. Lastly, the assistant principals had at least one year of experience within the current school district. An assistant principal that has been within the same school for one year has gained the insight and perspective of his or her role within that environment. Capturing the lived experiences of veteran assistant principals creates a strong dependence on the words and positions of the participants and required that this study originated from a qualitative perspective. Qualitative studies can have as little as one participant and as many as 60 participants, which will depend on the type of qualitative research design the researcher selected (Creswell, 2009). As this is a basic qualitative study, the number of participants was not to exceed 20, however, this number changed once I reached saturation. Merriam (2009) determined that 12-20 participants is effective for a basic qualitative inquiry. I reached the point of saturation after participant 12.

Data Collection

Informed consent. A letter was approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. Prior permission was obtained from the Superintendent of the district to conduct research in their district, in addition to obtaining

permission from assistant principals, who voluntarily participated in the study. The informed consent agreement contained the following:

- An invitation to participate in what, to what end, how, how long, and for whom?
- Risks
- Rights
- Possible benefits
- Dissemination
- Contact information and copies of the form. (Seidman, 2006, pp. 61-62)

The participants' confidentiality was maintained, and all responses were compiled so that the identification of individual participants is not accessible. Participants were reassured that their participation in the study would remain confidential and that no personal information such as name, address, school, or contact information will be shared in the study. The consent forms remained in a secure location, locked in a file cabinet to protect confidentiality. Informed consent form establishes trust between the participant and interviewer. Once the participant verbally agreed and signed the consent form, the first interview commenced.

Interviews. According to Patton (2002), "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe" (p. 340). Building on this, Merriam (2009) stated, "Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). Creswell (2009) suggested that an initial contact with participants provides an advance notice about interviews. Contact with participants in this study took place by e-mail, mail, phone, and personal contact with the researcher. Each initial interview was scheduled to last 60 minutes, with the interviewer offering to travel to the participant's home school on a mutually agreed upon time and date. Creswell (2009) articulated that a face-to-face interview plays an

important role in a basic qualitative study. I wanted to concentrate on one participant at a time, particularly considering the possibility of identification issues in the transcription and coding segment.

It was my intent to limit the amount of time for the first interview to one hour and the second interview to 30 minutes, to minimize the inconvenience for the participants. This hopefully made the process more convenient and comfortable for the participants. Each interview was held in an office to ensure privacy. All interview locations were based on comfort and/or convenience, especially the convenience of the interviewee. I avoided areas which might be loud or interruptive since the clarity of the tape would have been compromised. This privacy should of encouraged participants to speak freely about their experiences. As noted by Merrian (200), "Thus the interviewer-respondent interaction is a complex phenomenon. A skilled interviewer accounts for these factors in order to evaluate the data being obtained. Taking a stance that is nonjudgmental, sensitive, and respectful of the respondent is but a beginning point in the process" (p. 109). Since the interviews were audiotaped, the assistant principals were informed prior to the interview. At the beginning of the first interview, I collected the informed consent and had the participants answer the questionnaire. The questionnaire provided background information and assisted with initiating dialogue with the participants. Many of the early questions during the interview were ones that were asked on the questionnaire, such as, "How long have you been an assistant principal?" This was done to help relax the interviewee, build trust, and rapport. According to Patton (2002) "Rapport means that I respect the people being interviewed, so what they say is important because of who is saying it" (p. 366). I then asked the overarching questions that were

prepared ahead of time. However, when answers opened up new areas of interest or there was a need for further understanding, I probed the interviewee to go further in-depth.

The interviews conducted followed a semi-structured interview process. According to Merriam (2009), "This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 90). This format allowed me to gain specific information from the participants and discover new probes. Questions were prepared ahead of time; however, questions changed or were added depending upon the interview process. All participants received and responded to the same prepared open-ended questions. The two in-depth, semi-structured interviews were comprised of open-ended questions concentrating on the experiences of the participant. Questions for the second interview were developed after the first interview and the second interview was scheduled within two weeks of the first interview. The second interview was arranged for 30 minutes over the phone. After reviewing the transcript and initial phase of coding, I decided what areas of the experience necessitated further questioning. The second interview allowed for emerging themes to be further probed increasing the richness and depth of the research. The subsequent interview included more in-depth questions calling for more explanation and perceptions of their experiences. A majority of the questions for the second interview were generated after the first interview was analyzed and coded.

According to Creswell (2009) and Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), an organized data collection protocol is essential for qualitative research. The following protocol was implemented for the interview process:

1. The participant's name, date, and location of the interview, and background information were recorded.

2. The purpose of the study, how the results would be used, and the format of the interview were described.
3. The participant was invited to ask questions.
4. The signature for informed consent was obtained from the participant.
5. The interview began by asking questions and engaging in dialogue with the participant.
6. Audio of the dialogue was recorded and notes were taken throughout the interview in order to reflect key ideas.
7. The face-to-face interview was concluded by asking if the participant has any further comments or questions and thanking the participant for their time and participation.
8. The process of data collection continued to the point of saturation, at which no new themes or perspectives were generated.

Field notes. Note taking was used during the interviews to help formulate new questions and follow up questions as the interview proceeded. Notes also provided a backup in the event that the recorder failed to work and allowed me to record any observations. Note taking allowed me to step back from the data and reflect upon the process. Interview notes were taken throughout the interviews in order to reflect key ideas (Creswell, 2009). Tape recording preserved the actual conversation while note taking provided me with key phrases, terms, or major points. After all interviews, the tape was checked for problems, notes were reviewed for clarification, and additional observations were noted allowing for an audit trail. All notes were stored on a flash drive that was protected by a password.

Transcribing the interviews. Tape recording of interviews permits subsequent transcription of the data. Patton (2002) states, "Doing all or some of your own interview transcriptions (instead of having them done by a transcriber), for example, provides an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights" (p. 441). Transcribing each taped interview took place as soon as possible after the interview. I used a transcription service to help expedite the transcription of the

interviews. While waiting for the transcription, I listened to the tape recordings to better familiarize myself with the data. After receiving the transcription of each interview, I listened to the tape recording and referenced the observational notes to ensure accuracy in the transcription. Once I finished transcribing and coding the first round of interviews, the interviewees were contacted to review transcription and set up a second interview.

Data Analysis

One method to begin data analysis is to utilize post-interview notes. Merriam (2009) believed, "Post-interview notes allow the investigator to monitor the process of data collection as well as begin to analyze the information itself" (p. 110). Once the interview ended, I wrote down any reflections I had from the interview. Another technique for getting started was clustering the central ideas, categories, or process. Clustering the data provides another means of organizing large amounts of data. Seidel and Kelle (1995) argued that "Codes represent the decisive link between the original 'raw data,' that is, the textual material such as interview transcripts or field notes, on the one hand and the researcher's theoretical concepts on the other" (p. 52). Through the procedure of open coding, categories and subcategories were created as the data was clustered. By breaking the data into distinct parts, carefully examining, and comparing each participant's experience, I analyzed the data for similarities and differences. This process revealed phenomena of similar and different events for each participant. Open coding started after the first round of interviews. Similar words or phrases were highlighted in each interview. The data was studied by analyzing for themes, repeating ideas, and theoretical constructs such as: modeling the way; leadership routines; interdependence; co-perform; shared leadership; influence; tasks; roles; responsibilities;

school culture; school vision; leader; follower; delegated; and leadership strategies. Analyzing the data through the lens of distributed leadership theory required me to identify phrases and words related to the theory. Many of the words and phrases related to distributed leadership were related to structure, design, interaction, action, teaching, mentoring, and development of leadership skills. These phrases were titled and put into categories and subcategories. According to Merriam (2009) the way to start developing categories is by assigning codes to pieces of data. The creation of categories adhered to the following guidelines established by Merriam (2009):

1. Categories will reflect the purpose of the research.
2. Categories will be exhaustive.
3. Categories will be mutually exclusive.
4. Categories will be sensitizing.
5. Categories will be conceptually congruent. (pp. 185-186)

The follow up second interview was used to summarize the themes discovered from the first interview for accuracy and modify the themes from the second interview. According to Merriam (2009), "The challenge is to construct categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern that cuts across your data" (p. 181). The purpose of analysis was to find relationships between the data sources collected while looking for meaning and connections with distributed leadership that support my research questions.

Credibility

In a basic qualitative study, credibility exists in the study by estimating if the methods used are likely to yield truthful and profound pictures of the encounter or undergoing work of the applicant (Lodico et al., 2010). The primary purpose of this

study was giving the assistant principal a voice as he or she reflected upon his or her role and how it has impacted their ability to advance in their career. The data were justified and supported in several ways. One way that the data were justified is that any themes, constructs, and narratives were supported through multiple sources of data. The results relied greatly on interviews and field notes. Another way that data was given credibility is by the transparency of the data collection and analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The procedures for collecting, analyzing, and presenting data was clear enough so that the research and the data can be evidenced and supported. Reflexivity (researcher's biases) was expressed from the beginning of the study. Merriam (2009) concluded, "Investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken" (p. 219). I shared with the participants my current role as an assistant principal and my experiences in the educational profession. Additionally, I informed the participants that I would be interviewing multiple individuals in order to get a variety of perspectives. It was imperative for myself as a researcher to constantly check my subjectivity throughout the study of my field notes and reflections. Another way that the data was supported is through the second interview in which I summarized themes and/or categories from the first interview. The second interview protocol was developed after coding and analyzing the first group of interviews.

According to Merriam (2009) member checking entails "Taking data and tentative interpretations back to people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible" (p.229). Member checking was used after transcription of all interviews to ensure accuracy of the data. Credibility was addressed by sending the transcriptions of the interviews back to the participants to confirm accuracy in collecting and reporting the

data. Each interviewee was allotted a time to verify information presented. Feedback from the interviewees assisted in supporting the credibility of the study. The use of member checking aided in preventing biases in the transcriptions.

Transferability

Merriam (2009) stated, "Although generalizability in the statistical sense (from a random sample to the population) cannot occur in qualitative research, that's not to say that nothing can be learned from a qualitative study" (p. 224). The concept of transferability applies itself well to qualitative research. Transferability in a qualitative study is a notion in which "the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 224-225).

Researchers have contended that the assistant principal is an under-researched area, and it is typically a position that can lead to the job of principal. Much of the research on the assistant principalship involves the duties and knowledge needed for the job. Taking all of this into consideration, there is a need to understand how veteran assistant principals perceive how they became to be veteran assistant principals and why they have not ascended to the principalship.

Dependability

Dependability was supported in this research through the use of following a standardized protocol and peer reviewing. Dependability was amplified during the research through the use of standardized questions for each interview participant and following a protocol to ensure that the data collection measures were identical for each

interview. After transcription, I reviewed each page to safeguard against possible mistakes that could have occurred during the transcription process. Creswell (2009) recommended that researchers review transcripts to make sure there are no obvious mistakes. Utilizing peer reviews required colleagues approving to read and review the research study findings and the data to safeguard that the interpreted results appeared consistent with the data. Merriam (2002) suggested peer reviewers can be colleagues who have comprehensive knowledge of the research focus or someone with limited knowledge. To attain dependability, the results must be consistent with the data collected. Triangulation assisted in this process. A questionnaire, two interviews, and field notes were my sources of data collection in this study. This provided me access to a variety of data that assisted me in attaining as much insight and data about the phenomenon. The objective was to ensure that the perspectives gained on how veteran assistant principals viewed their ability to be promoted to the principalship was consistent with the data collected. Merriam (2009) argued that dependability in a qualitative study was not reliant on the ability to duplicate the findings but instead on the results being consistent with the data collected.

Summary

Chapter three includes details about the research method and design. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of veteran secondary assistant principals regarding their ability to ascend to the job of principal. The basic qualitative design was appropriate because the purpose of this study was to explore and discover rich thick descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants. An in-depth interview process yielded meaningful data from the sample of veteran assistant

principals. Through purposeful sampling, the participants consisted of the following: (a) assistant principals in middle and high school from one district in Virginia, (b) assistant principals served in the capacity of the assistant principalship for a minimum of 7 years, and (c) assistant principals had at least 1 year of experience within the current school district. The criterion for the sample was middle and high school veteran assistant principals because the secondary assistant principalship is unique in how tasks and roles are divided between multiple assistant principals within the building. By having more than one assistant principal, it allows for the principal to utilize distributed leadership theory to develop the leadership skills of their assistant principals. Elementary veteran assistant principals were not included because there is usually only one assistant principal per building and their experience can be different from secondary assistant principals. I contacted the individuals who met the criteria via telephone and e-mail that fit the criterion until saturation of data was met. The point of saturation occurred with participant 12. The veteran assistant principals shared their experiences as being an assistant principal and how it influenced their chances to move into the position of principal or desire to apply. In summary, this study noted important findings that will assist within the educational field.

Chapter 4: Findings

This section of my research is my depiction of the voices of twelve veteran secondary assistant principals. Each participant shared his or her role, responsibilities, and perceptions of the job and the principalship. In this study, I explored how veteran secondary assistant principals made meaning of their chances of possible promotion to principal using semi-structured interviews. The questions during the interview process provided a starting point for conversation and reflection. Several codes and themes emerged from the data to answer the research questions:

> What are the perceptions of veteran assistant principals as to why they have not ascended to the principalship or applied for a principalship (specifically reflecting on their past experiences, relationships, preparation, and events)?
>
> What perceived leadership experiences within the scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to or limit ascension to the principalship?

As assistant principals reflected upon the daily duties they perform, their described duties related to instruction as being the most imperative aspect to prepare them for the job of principal even though they voiced that a majority of their time was spent on managerial tasks. While they tried to be active in instructional aspects, assistant principals described their involvement as limited because of their many responsibilities as assistant principals. They explained that it was ultimately the responsibility of the building principal to determine what tasks the assistant principal would perform. As assistant principals discussed their role and experiences as assistant principals, they all entered administration with some inclination of eventually moving into the job of principal. Conversely, as they progressed in their career, some, at the time of this study,

have yet to apply for the principalship and others have voiced that they no longer have the desire to apply for principal. Categories and themes emerged as participants shared their experiences as assistant principals. I have sought to represent their stories and words with care to depict an accurate account of secondary veteran assistant principals and reasons for not progressing to the principalship.

Crotty (1998) stated "Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (p. 8). My epistemological perspective of constructivism is grounded in how individuals perceive the world through their interactions and experiences. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to understand the meaning a phenomenon has for the participants (Merriam, 2002). The job of principal has been transforming and changing as education changes. The job has become more complex and demanding as schools are required to meet the needs of diverse learners and meet high stakes testing standards. As the job of principal has evolved, so has the job of assistant principals. Chapter 4 offers an overview of the data collection and analysis, and it provides a summary of the results as I examined the role of assistant principal and their perceptions on their failure to apply or ascend to the principalship.

Data Collection and Analysis

I collected the data between the months of June and September when students were not in school. Data were collected using two semi-structured interviews and memoing/field notes. The preliminary part of analysis included open coding and was conducted after each interview as it assisted in organizing the information. When coding, I used comparative method to assist in identifying any patterns or frequently used codes throughout interviews. Comparative method required me to continuously compare the

participants' experiences, statements, and any other information gathered during data collection (Seidel & Kelle, 1995). I also utilized clustering, which allowed me to group central ideas and categories. During analysis, I identified and categorized phrases and words related to distributed leadership theory. The field notes assisted in seeing patterns and revealing any gaps that needed to be addressed during the second interview. Twelve middle school and high school assistant principals from one school district were interviewed at two different times. The first interview was conducted in person at a location convenient for the participant. Conversations with each participant lasted 45 minutes – 90 minutes. At the conclusion of the first round of interviews, the coding from the interview and field notes allowed me to see patterns and gaps to aide in creating second round questions. An initial analysis of the data after the first interview resulted in over 50 codes that assisted in preparing questions for the second interview. The second interview was conducted over the phone and scheduled to last no longer than 30 minutes. By conducting the second interview I was able to probe further and ask additional questions that surfaced after coding the first round of interviews. The second interview also allowed me to compare my field notes with the codes and themes to identify areas that needed further investigation. Merriam (2009) argued that the semi-structured interview process allows the researcher to respond and appropriately adjust the questioning to the participants. After the second interview and analysis, the codes were put into categories based on keywords or concepts and were then compiled into five major themes that assisted in answering the two research questions. Once the themes were generated, participants were contacted and given the opportunity to give input on the themes and make any corrections.

Participant Descriptions

The participants were from one school district in Virginia. The majority of the principals within this school district served as assistant principals within the school district prior to becoming principals. All participants served as an assistant principal for at least seven years with at least one year in the current school district. Within the school district, twenty-two assistant principals at the secondary level met the study's requirements: fourteen males and eight females. Out of the possible twenty-two assistant principals, twelve volunteered to participate in the study. I sent out a preliminary e-mail requesting volunteers for my study and followed it up with a second e-mail. I offered to meet the participants at a location and time convenient to them. To encourage participation, I offered to buy the participants lunch because many of them where using their lunch time to participate in the study. Even with the offer of lunch, it was difficult to receive more female participation due to the study being conducted when some were on summer vacation.

Seven of the assistant principals were currently serving in a high school setting and five assistant principals were working in a middle school setting. Ten of the assistant principals served as classroom teachers prior to becoming assistant principals and their time as a classroom teacher ranged between 5-24 years. Two of the assistant principals served as school counselors prior to becoming assistant principals and were in that capacity for 15-19 years. The assistant principals' years of experience in administration ranged from 7-21 years. Table 2 provides the participants' demographics and is reported in ranges to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Table 2

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Years Teacher/ Counselor	Years Assistant Principal	Level of School	Applied for the Principal
Adam	Male	White	40-49	5-9	10-13	Middle	Yes
Alice	Female	Black	50-59	15-19	7-10	Middle	Yes
Bob	Male	White	40-49	15-19	7-10	High	Yes
Beth	Female	White	40-49	15-19	7-10	Middle	Yes
Carl	Male	Black	50-59	15-19	18-21	High	Yes
Dan	Male	White	40-49	10-14	10-13	High	Yes
Ed	Male	White	50-59	20-24	7-10	Middle	Yes
Frank	Male	White	50-59	10-14	14-17	High	Yes
Gabe	Male	White	40-49	5-9	10-13	High	No
Henry	Male	White	40-49	5-9	10-13	Middle	Yes
Ivan	Male	Black	30-39	5-9	7-10	High	No
Jim	Male	White	40-49	15-19	7-10	High	Yes

This school district is a combination of rural and urban centers with approximately 39,000 students: 55% White, 35% Black, 4% Hispanic, 3% Asian, .03% American Indian/Alaska Native. Within the school district, 34% of students were identified as economically disadvantaged. Moreover, this school district did not meet all federal Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOS) for the 2016-2017 school year.

Using two semi-structured interviews, I first concentrated on the assistant principal's journey into education and administration and used the second interview to fill in any gaps in the data. Eight of the twelve assistant principals regardless of gender or level of school decided to move into the role of assistant principal because they wanted to have a greater influence. Ivan stated, "I saw myself doing more. And I figured the best route for me to go, now that I'm into education, is administration." Similarly, Gabe voiced, "I guess I felt like I wanted to have a bigger impact on things in a broader sense, policy wise and things of that nature." These assistant principals wanted a larger role

within a school and through the assistant principalship, they believed they could have a greater impact. They described themselves as desiring more leadership and responsibility. Carl, Dan, and Frank's primary reason for entering administration was financial. They all mentioned having large families and considered themselves the primary revenue source for their families. Bob entered administration because he was curious and interested in the decision-making process of building administrators. He was fascinated with school policy and the impact administrators played on implementing policy.

Within the school district, there is a leadership academy for those desiring to become administrators and a partnership with a university for educators who want to pursue their master's degree in educational leadership and policy. First year assistant principals are all assigned to a cohort for their first year that provides professional development from various school district leaders. The district also offers an Aspiring Principals Academy for any assistant principal who is interested in becoming a principal. Ten of the twelve participants attended the Aspiring Principals Academy and referenced it as equipping them with skills desired by the school district for the principalship. These assistant principals believed the academy was one of the necessary steps needed if they desired to become a principal within the district. Many of them voiced they were advised by their principal and other administrators to attend the academy if they wished to one day be a principal within the school district.

Themes from the Research

My data analysis produced five major themes that assisted in answering my research questions: deterrents to the principalship, mistakes and missteps during the

assistant principalship, school politics and impact on promotion, experiences needed for the principalship, and assistant principal development and the principalship. In this section, each theme and the connection to the research questions will be discussed.

Deterrents to the principalship. Various disincentives is an aspect of the principalship that several of the assistant principals mentioned as deterring them from applying for the principalship or causing them to question their desire to become a principal. The participants described the job of principal as complex due to the various roles the principal must fill daily. In an era of high stakes testing and accountability, they believed it is the principal who is ultimately held responsible for the performance of the school adding pressure to an already demanding job. The principalship is demanding and for some assistant principals there are aspects of the job that deter them from pursing the principalship. Ivan described the job of principal as being complex when he said, "The principal is constantly on the go, putting out fires with students, parents, and staff. The job is never done and everyone wants more of you. That's why I'm willing to wait; I'm happy with what I'm doing." Participants mentioned deterrents that have caused them to question their desire to become principal. Adam, Carl, Henry, and Jim no longer have interest in applying for the principalship due to some deterrents and Gabe and Ivan have yet to apply for the principalship because of deterrents to the job. All six of them voiced that it was one or more of the deterrents that prevented them from applying, or continuing to apply, for the principalship and not the lack of being promoted.

Participants identified that the principal works long hours. However, some assistant principals were concerned with the increased hours and missing time with family. The amount of time it takes to be an effective principal hindered some from

applying for the principalship. Frank made his family his top priority for his first few years of administration and said, “Family was the priority… I think 11 years and not dipping my toe in those waters, I think that may have probably hurt me a little bit.” Similarly, Gabe has not applied for the principalship because of time away from his family and stated,

> The reason I have not is because of my child, and due to my family dynamics, I take a large caregiving role at home. I didn’t feel like it would be fair to me or any school to take on that responsibility of being principal while still tethered to that.

However, he did discuss applying for the principalship once his child graduated high school. Jim agreed stating, “I still want to be a father first, and don’t want to short change my responsibilities as a father, and don’t think it would be fair to the school system for me to short change the responsibilities as a principal.”

There is also a financial factor that discouraged some assistant principals from making the move to the principalship. Assistant principals discussed that the pay did not justify the added stress and time commitment. Several assistant principals discussed that the school district only gives a 5% raise for being promoted to principal and found it to be underwhelming. Adam revealed salary as an issue hindering him from applying for the principalship when he stated,

> I think you get so much more added pressure and stress on you for very little pay increase. Double the hours of what an AP does because they expect the principal to be here at all hours of the night and I think it’s like a 5% raise. You do the math and it’s just not worth it.

Beth voiced some similar concerns about salary when she said,

> There's some days where I don't want to be a principal, because I like the comfort of knowing that there's someone else that it goes to. That somebody else is in charge. There's also a financial factor right now. When you're a principal, there's a

> lot more responsibility. It takes a lot more time and you don't really get a raise. You might get a couple thousand dollars a year and that it. It's a whole lot more for a lot less, when you look at it based upon the amount of time you put in or whatever.

No assistant principal discussed an amount of extra pay that would make the job more desirable, but they did indicate that 5% was not adequate. Bob, Ivan, and Jim argued the building principal should be the highest paid employee in their school building, but that it is not the current situation for some principals in their school district. This information was verified through public information available through the school system.

For some assistant principals who have been in the position for a few years, they expressed the job of principal has transformed and added additional stress due to the implementation of federal, state, and district initiatives. Each initiative added creates more work for the principal and assistant principal. He voiced the initiatives are frustrating for administrators because once they have mastered one, a new one comes along. When Adam was asked if anything has changed to make the principalship less desirable than when he first entered administration with the desire to one day become a principal he said,

> If you are a Title I school where the school is not accredited, you have the pressure of achieving accreditation, which you have to come up with a lot of extra programs to do. You have to ensure those are put forth with effort. I think just the hours that you're going to spend doing all the extra paperwork in order to turn in all of these reports that you read and every year they change. One year you do INDISTAR. You spend hours and hours doing that, then the next year they tell you that was going away. We don't know what's taking its place now, so then you have all work, it was for nothing. Then whatever program they give you now you have to learn that program, and then, start from scratch again. Just the amount of programs that are implemented that come from downtown it seems like a different initiative every year, you can't master the first initiative and they're throwing another initiative that they want to do.

Adam explained that he had witnessed multiple principals at several low performing schools take on the daunting task of having to implement new initiative after new initiative without having a say within their own building. He believed that it added stress to an already difficult job.

Another deterrent implied by a few assistant principals was that along with long hours for little compensation the principal is a high stress job that requires a person to be flexible. They voiced how a principal needs to have the ability to switch roles quickly and troubleshoot. Henry explained the complexity of the job of principal when he said,

> When I watch the principals, they have to change a hat every five minutes. I would say the preponderance of the time recently is trying to ensure that quality instruction is going on, and learning is going on in the classrooms ... and, since the budget issue, morale. Trying to find ways to inspire people and keep people doing good things on a limited budget, with limited means, is challenging.

Alice stated, "I have always known being principal is an all-encompassing position. But I do not believe I realized the true depth of it when I first became an AP. The position is almost all things to all people." She went on to talk about the difficulties a school faces when trying to make state accreditation and how no matter the outcome, the principal will be held responsible by the school district and community. She said, "The principal realized whether we made it or not, the principal's name was going to be attached to the school for that year. I have not sat in that seat, but I imagine that it is an incredible amount of pressure." Bob agreed stating, "The job of principal comes with more responsibilities than it did in the past." Similarly, Carl proposed that the job of principal involved more paperwork than it used to be stating, "It is less hands on and more paperwork than in the past." Carl believed that the added paperwork was an unneeded distraction for the principal that took the principal away from other areas of need.

Another deterrent expressed by some of the assistant principals is the lack of grandeur and autonomy attached to the position of principal. Beth voiced that the principal does not receive the same level of respect that the position once held, sharing that many of the decision making has been taken away from the building principal and is being made by individuals in the central office. Beth was adamant that the job of principal has changed for the worse over the years and said,

> It used to be, you became a principal of a building and they said this is what we expect from you and you made it happen, and they allowed you that autonomy to go in and do what you wanted to do. It's not like that anymore. Now, it's a lot more middle management, because you've got folks from central office that are in your building, they want to know what's going on, there's that accountability factor, and even for principals that are doing what is required, and they're showing there's improvements, it's like they're still getting bombarded. It's almost like, sometimes, I would assume that sometimes you feel like, hey, I'm doing all this great stuff and I'm doing exactly what you want me to do and I'm getting the results that you want me to get, but you're still coming in here all the time, so do you trust me? You know there's those questions about it. I don't feel like the principalship has the respect that it used to.

Dan agreed that the principal no longer has autonomy and stated,

> The principal is no longer the primary decision maker in the building but must run everything through the school administration building. It is no longer acceptable for a principal to make a decision based on what is best for building.

Some assistant principals felt the ability to have ultimate say as a building principal no longer exists. Several expressed that the superintendent's staff and directors have limited the decision making of the building principal. Therefore, the attraction of being the principal has decreased.

The deterrents mentioned by the assistant principals in the study caused four of them to lose interest in applying for the principalship while others questioned if promotion is worth the headaches of the job. Another area of concern for the assistant

principals within this study was critical mistakes or miscues during their time as assistant principal. Several assistant principals viewed their mistakes as the main reason for remaining an assistant principal.

Mistakes and missteps during the assistant principalship. When an employee takes on a new job, mistakes are expected, but there are some mistakes that cannot be overcome. Some assistant principals expressed that they made mistakes during their assistant principalship that may have prevented them from being promoted to a principalship. They believed the mistakes they made no matter the size had an unpleasant impact on their career advancement. Some mistakes participants made had to do with how they prioritized their career advancement, the role they were given in a school, or situations that occurred in and outside the school setting.

An overarching tone of the assistant principals was that a primary job of the assistant principal is dealing with student discipline. For many, they expressed it as the one task that takes up a majority of their day and for some it can define them in the school culture. Several assistant principals voiced that the school community viewed the assistant principal's job as the disciplinarian due to a lack of involvement with the instructional aspects of running a school because they are given the task of dealing with student issues. Dan believed he is viewed as a disciplinarian first and not an instructional expert. He stated,

> But being in education for as long as I have, I know that well right now, I don't want my legacy to be that I suspended a lot of kids. You know, unfortunately as an assistant principal, a lot of time, that's depending on what role you play, that's what I feel a large part of my career has been is I suspend a lot of kids. I don't want that to be my legacy in education.

He understood that his role in the building was to make it a safe learning environment and took comfort in the idea that there is value in his role. He discussed how his job of disciplinarian allows for learning to take place in the classroom. However, he is concerned that he is not taken seriously for a principalship because his image is of a strict disciplinarian and not an instructional expert. Dan explained that he has tried to be more involved with instructional tasks but he is consumed with discipline.

Another mistake or misstep mentioned was when an assistant principal becomes content in their current position. Assistant principals in the participating school district are given the option each year to request a transfer to a different school and for some this means to add a different experience to their resume. Some assistant principals never request a change and are moved to another school while others request a new experience and never receive one. Some explained they were exposed to a variety of tasks because they were assistant principals in more than one setting and served under different principals. Several assistant principals voiced the importance of having multiple experiences and working for a variety of principals. Frank enjoyed 11 years he spent at one school as an assistant principal and believed he received insightful mentorship from the principals there, but he also views it as a mistake for not applying for a principalship or requesting a transfer to receive another experience during his 11 years at that one building. He said,

> I know there is a principalship coming open. I think I would be a good fit. Now do the powers that be think that? You know here I am late in my career and I'll tell you what probably was a mistake was the 11 years I spent at one school. I did not put my foot out there once, I just didn't do it… I'm sliding down that hill I think at this point. But not in a way where I'm like over it, I'm not jaded, I'm not anything like that.

Frank valued his 11 years at the one school and enjoyed each year there. However, as he reflected upon his career, he recognized the importance of being exposed to different experiences and has grown professionally from his new school experience. He discussed the importance of assistant principals having the opportunity to work and learn from a variety of school leaders. He also stressed the significance of assistant principals advocating for themselves to be put in positions to better prepare themselves for a principalship. Frank argued that he had grown professionally because he changed school settings and now has a variety of experiences.

Another mistake expressed was being perceived as overconfident in their own abilities or knowledge of the job. All of the assistant principals first entered administration with aspirations of one day becoming principal. These aspirations led the assistant principals to work hard and to prepare themselves for the principalship. At some point during their assistant principalship, some felt prepared for the job of principal and started to apply. They explained that during this application process, assistant principals compared themselves and their experiences to that of other principal candidates to gauge their own readiness. When conducting this comparison, many assistant principals felt confident in their own knowledge and skill set, which sometimes caused them to become overconfident. Henry transferred from one school to another with hope that his new experience would be what he needed to be selected for a principalship. Upon his arrival, he was confident in his skills as an administrator and carried himself with what he thought was the confidence of a future principal. Henry recognized that was a mistake and commented,

> I think one of the mistakes I made when I first got here was, I wasn't really thinking I'm a cocky, arrogant person, like, I'm not going to be here long, but I

> thought, I come from this high achieving school, I'm going to show you people in this school how to do this, and, I'm trying to become the Principal, so I need to act like the Principal. But I wasn't the Principal, and I didn't know exactly what I was doing because I thought, we're doing it wrong, when in reality this is how this type of school works. So I had to learn all that stuff.

He revealed that he has learned from his past mistakes and is learning and growing as a school leader in his current school placement. However, he does not believe in changing who he is to become principal and stated,

> I'll be honest with you. If it is because maybe I challenge, sometimes, more than I should, or I'm too honest, I can live with that. And then I don't need to evolve, because I'd rather be that as much as I can, and not have to sacrifice that in order to move up.

He commented that he is settled into his current school placement and is appreciative of the differences between the school cultures he has experienced. Henry voiced that he has embraced his current situation and is currently not interested in applying for a principalship.

Some mistakes or missteps can occur after work hours for assistant principals. Several assistant principals voiced that when becoming a school administrator, the community holds you to a higher moral and ethical standard than the average citizen. At a school the principal is held to the highest standards and expected to model exceptional behavior in school and within the community. Ed had aspirations for the principalship since becoming an assistant principal and was in the process of interviewing for principal when his actions confirmed that a lapse in judgment outside of school can impact ascension to the principalship. He stated,

> I sunk myself. I made a mistake[1] outside of school that allowed my judgment to be questioned. I was in the process of being interviewed for principal when my mistake occurred. I questioned if I should move forward with my interview, but in the end, decided to proceed with the interview. That was hard, that was a hard

[1] The nature of the mistake was not divulged out of protection of the participant.

> interview. I answered the questions, I didn't feel as comfortable with that interview as I did the first one, but I knew, just knowing the system here, I knew I wasn't going to get anything. I knew that's it.

Ed discussed that this critical mistake changed him and caused him to do some soul searching in his personal and professional life. It has resulted in him changing his life style. He sadly expressed that he will never become a principal in his current school district because of his mistake and said, "I understand things happen for a reason, and the reason was for me not to become a principal at that time. That's not to say I could never become one, but I think in my current school district, that ship has sailed." Many assistant principals explained that the job of principal is hard and at times it can be stressful. However, the majority of assistant principals explained that the school district is looking for applicants who can handle stressful situations in an appropriate manner and are expected be a model citizen for their school at all times. Some of the assistant principals expressed that the principal is expected to immolate high morals and good decision making at all times.

School politics and impact on promotion. Some of the participants viewed school politics as a part of the culture that has been there since the start and will always remain part of the culture. Several assistant principals expressed that political motives take place within their school district and specifically within the school building. Many school districts are governed by school boards and within this study, an elected school board. The school board hires the superintendent who is in charge of running the school district and ultimately selects the building principals. These individuals are members of the community who have colleagues, friends, neighbors, businesses, and churches that can influence their decision making when it comes to selecting school leaders. Several

assistant principals within this study believed politics worked in favor of other assistant principals or negatively impacted their own career.

Some assistant principals discussed the influence the principal can have on their career advancement. Some of the principals are politically connected with school board members, central office employees, or members of the superintendent's staff. When discussing career advancement, some of the assistant principals commented on the relationships that principals have or do not have with central office administrators and the influence it can have on their own career. Adam discussed the political role the principal plays when he said,

> I think what would hold you back is if you have a principal that doesn't push for you to be a principal, who doesn't push downtown with the people who need to hear your name if you're ready to be a principal or not. I think, in my journey as an AP, I've been with two principals who are brand new, first year as a principal, so they're busy learning their job so I don't think they really pushed for me to be a principal.

The majority of assistant principals rely on the principal to promote them to central office administrators as being ready for the principalship and push them as the best possible candidate. They believed the building principal has opportunities through meetings and conversations to encourage central office administrators to consider their assistant principal for a principalship. Beth commented on the political influence of the building principal when she said, "The principal decides how much power to give his AP and influences their ability to be considered for principal if they decided to endorse their AP as the next best principal." Alice similarly stated, "I believe the step that propels most administrators into the position is from the building principal. Central office usually takes into consideration what the building principal says about their AP, I believe it weighs heavily."

For several assistant principals, the lack of relationship with the principal negatively impacted their ascension to the principalship. Jim did not have a positive professional relationship with one principal he worked for, and he believed it negatively impacted his pursuit to become principal. He also stated the relationship discouraged him from continuing to apply for the principalship. He said, "So her lack of smiling, her lack of enjoyment in the job, has skewed my vision on that position as far as professional appeal." Jim voiced that in order to be considered for the principalship, the building principal needs to fully endorse the assistant principal and continually promote them to the superintendent's staff.

Some participants stressed that politics can work against assistant principals wishing to become principal. Carl discussed that in some cases, it may not come down to what one knows but instead who one knows. He said,

> But you find out really quickly if you're observant enough that really the principals and the assistant superintendents and the superintendent, they know who they're going to already pick, so it's just a matter of the waiting out process. And once you realize that it's not the qualification and it's not your skill level, in many cases it's a matter of who you know and who the district would feel comfortable being in a particular school. Those are more important than maybe what you could bring to the job.

Similarly, Ed stated, "This school district has got a pecking order and I'm not in that pecking order, not even sniffing around the zip code of the pecking order." Ed believed office administrators had predetermined the best candidates for the principalship.

Ivan revealed that timing is imperative when applying for the principalship because the administrators in central office will inform assistant principals when it is their time to be a principal. He expressed that it did not matter if an assistant principal

applied because the decision was already made about who should be the next principal. He stated,

> I'm a firm believer that when they're ready for you, they'll get you…I think they already have an idea. I mean the principals talk to them. They already have an idea of what they want to do, or the better fit for you…But if you hold tight, you're going to be okay.

Agreeing, Henry discussed that it did not matter for some assistant principals if they apply for the principalship. He commented,

> I have been privy to situations where people seem to get phone calls to express an interest in a certain position that they never necessarily applied for the position to begin with. Not because they didn't want it, but because they felt like it was supposed to go to somebody else, or because they were just ... they'd just got into their current position or whatever it is, right? And I've seen that work out well for those people. So my thought process is, if they didn't have to check this career interest thing, and they got a phone call to do that, they know where I work. If I'm doing a good job, they'll call me if there's something that they think would be a good fit for me.

Dan voiced that the building principal should be selected based upon experience and skill level. He talked about being told by central office administrators that sometimes the decision comes down to being what is the best fit for the school. He stated,

> The politics get in the way of selecting who is the best for the job of principal. Everyone at central office has their person or is listening to someone else and is basing their decision upon that. It is not always what you know but who you know.

Some administrators have the ability to ascend through the ranks more quickly than others. This can be due to many different factors, but several assistant principals believed politics is the major reason within their district. Gabe has yet to apply for a principalship, but through his observations accepted there are political factors in deciding who becomes a building principal. He said,

> I feel like a lot of times principals, I mean I can only speak for this school system, I feel like they're thrust into position not having the amount of experience that they should have, you know not being able to be a part of all those things that they need to be a part of because they climb the ladder quickly because of who they know.

The participants recognized the job of principal as being difficult and having a variety of experiences as an assistant principal is beneficial to becoming a principal. However, some assistant principals discussed political factors as being the major reason for some assistant principals' ascension to the principalship.

Experiences needed for the principalship. Schools are reliant on assistant principals performing the managerial duties needed for schools to run efficiently. Assistant principals in this study voiced they are required to manage a variety of tasks throughout the school day. As assistant principals discussed their development, they expressed they have many tasks assigned to them that consume their time. Most of the assistant principals viewed their assigned duties as necessary to prepare for the principalship with a majority of them expressing instructional tasks as being most critical to their development. However, many of the assigned duties are not related to instruction and are considered managerial tasks.

When explaining their duties, many of the assistant principals had to list them out because there are so many tasks they handle with their job. Ed stated, "I told somebody my duties, another assistant principal…the response was, 'God, you got all that!'" Alice described her primary duties as, "Everything!" She expressed that she had been assigned discipline, textbooks, property manager, classroom observations, attend professional learning communities (PLCs), bus duty, cafeteria duty, impact aid, and supervision of athletic events and after school activities. In asking her what duties she perceived as

preparing her for the principalship, she revealed that anything connected with instruction was imperative. She expressed she has never experienced special education or dealt with the development of the master schedule. She viewed both of these shortcomings as something needed to better prepare her for the principalship. Adam voiced that he had many duties assigned to him and stated,

> I'm in charge of a grade, so I do all of the grade level discipline. I do grade level IEP meetings, lunch duties, bus duty, deal with referrals, classroom walk throughs, and classroom observations. I help staff and help interview. I also help with curriculum and PLC meetings. I go over team minutes and give any feedback to the teams on my grade level. I'm also in charge of a content area, so I have to ensure their tests and data are turned in.

Adam described the duty that most prepared him for the principalship as "…instructional part, getting in the classrooms, doing observations, writing up what was going on when you went in the classroom and kind of give them feedback." Beth similarly stated that her duties included overseeing a grade level, discipline, special education liaison, truancy, substitute teachers, lunch duty, and supervising events. She expressed that instructional duties and managing the building were important in preparing her for the principalship. Carl also regarded instructional tasks as the most important preparation for the principalship. However, the majority of his time was spent dealing with discipline. His duties included discipline, transportation, homebound services, AVID liaison, math and foreign language liaison. When describing his duties, Dan stated, "Well primary duties first and foremost are to support and help facilitate the vision of the principal." He went on to state that his assigned duties were discipline, substitutes, locker assignments, property manager, safety drills, athletics liaison, security liaison, monitoring extracurricular activities, and student attendance issues. He further stated that, "A big one that I've fallen into the most is setting discipline guidelines as well as enforcing

them." Dan recognized instructional tasks as being the most important task to help develop his skill set and knowledge to become principal, but he explained that the majority of his time was taken with discipline tasks. Frank also emphasized that a large part of his day involved discipline. He commented, "Discipline is overwhelming. It takes a large part of the day." He also perceived instructional tasks such as classroom observations as being vital to the development of assistant principals. Ed expressed creating the master schedule as a specific instructional task that was preparing him for the principalship. He described his duties as grade level discipline, math and science liaison, leave forms, property manager, master schedule, textbooks, and truancy. Bob expressed his duties as, "Anything that the principal asks of you." He explained that his assigned duties are grade level discipline, bus duty, athletic liaison, security liaison, custodian liaison, and lunch duty.

In repeated conversations, some assistant principals emphasized the importance of experiencing all assistant principal duties with no one task being more important in their development than another. Bob explained there was no specific duty that better prepared an assistant principal for the principalship, but he felt it was imperative that an assistant principal have some experience in every duty. He stated, "I think you don't have to know everything, but you have to know a little bit of everything. You don't have to be an expert on it, but it certainly is advantageous for you to experience the different things." Gabe agreed stating, "I guess it's helpful to have a little smidgen of everything. I feel that to be prepared to be principal you should have experiences related to all those things." He described his duties as discipline, classroom observations, lockers, textbooks, federal cards, truancy, special education liaison, and supervising events.

Henry also emphasized the importance of experiencing all duties. He stated, "I've pretty much done everything and I've been fortunate. I count that as a blessing." When he was asked to describe one duty that was essential for his development to become principal he said,

> And I think that's where I struggle. I think right now, because the trend is the instructional thing. It seems so odd that anyone would say that. That's the whole reason we have a school is to provide instruction, and we should. But again, the reality of it is there are so many other things that go on, in terms of community relations, just the students themselves, and their families, and trying to help them through crisis situations; whether it is abuse, or they're hurting themselves, things like that. Those are all preparatory things for the principal role.

Ivan commented that everything he does prepares him for the principalship. He stated, "Speaking from a high school point of view. I think everything that you do here, high school's more political. And so, I think dealing with people every day, and putting out fires. Learning how to motivate; that's principalship." He expressed the importance of developing people skills as an assistant principal as being critical to professional development. Jim also emphasized the importance of having a basic understanding of all duties. He stated, "I don't think you have to have your hand in all of them. I think you have to have at least knowledge of how they operate in your building." Jim described his duties as discipline, textbooks, buses, athletics liaison, custodial liaison, property manager, and monitoring instruction through observations.

Many assistant principals believed on-the-job experiences for assistant principals are critical to their overall development as leaders and possible future principals. The experiences of assistant principals are often determined by the building principal. Alice stated, "I see my job as the assistant is to help the principal out anytime." Similarly, Dan explained, "My job is to support the principal and perform whatever duties the principal

assigns me." Many of the assistant principals described instructional tasks as being the most important to their development, but a majority of their time is spent dealing with managerial issues and discipline. Jim expressed his frustration by stating, "The reality is, there are a lot of things that get in the way of monitoring instruction. So it makes me less effective as an instructional leader." When asked to describe what gets in the way he stated, "Well, of course discipline gets in the way. There's always tasks, there's always projects, there's always other things that have to be done." Many things are demanded of the assistant principal during their day. Assistant principals are responsible for a variety of diverse responsibilities and many can be categorized as managerial in nature. Henry stated, "I think what happens sometimes is that we do our best…there are a lot of duties…little things like marquee. Not a big deal, but it's just something that you've got to make sure you plan to take care of." Many participants viewed these responsibilities as time consuming and taking away from opportunities for assistant principals to take on educational leadership roles. When assistant principals are not given the chance to be exposed to all the aspects of the principalship, they are put at a disadvantage when trying to ascend to the principalship.

Assistant principal development and the principalship. Many of the assistant principals recognized deliberate assistant principal development as an important aspect in the professional growth of assistant principals to ensure that they will be ready for the principalship when the opportunity arises. Some of the participating assistant principals expressed the importance of experiencing all aspects of the principalship prior to becoming principal. They described the job of principal as being all encompassing and requiring someone who was given the chance to practice his or her leadership skills as an

assistant principal. This section will discuss the need for – and lack of – assistant principal development that can provide opportunity to the principalship or limit access.

Professional learning for the participating assistant principals consisted of in-services and the school district's Aspiring Principals Academy. The assistant principals discussed the school district offering professional development for administrators on a variety of educational topics. Adam shared, "The school district offers professional development for administrators so assistant principals can always sign up for a session if they feel they lack experience in a specific area however, they need more inservices for those wishing to be a principal." Alice explained that she was not as knowledgeable of special education because she was never given the opportunity to be the administrative liaison. However, she did attend professional development on special education that was provided by the school district. Similarly, Bob believed that the school division offered adequate professional development opportunities for assistant principals. He stated, "The school district offers a variety of professional development for administrators so that they have some knowledge of everything." Bob did offer that professional development could be improved by allowing assistant principals the opportunity to shadow principals in other buildings. He stated, "An area the school district could improve is by allotting time for assistant principals to shadow principals in other buildings and at other levels." Similarly, Ed voiced, "Assistant principals need to have more opportunities to shadow a variety of principals to have a better understanding of the job." Beth suggested that professional development should include more opportunities for assistant principals to be part of district-wide committees.

During the interview process, 10 of the 12 participating assistant principals stated they had participated in the Aspiring Principals Academy. All of the assistant principals who participated in the academy believed it assisted them in their preparation for the principalship. Dan stated, "The Aspiring Principals Academy gave me the opportunity to learn from various principals and discuss current issues in schools with other administrators. It was one of the few professional development opportunities that allowed dialogue between participants." The Aspiring Principals Academy was established by the school district to better prepare assistant principals for a future principalship. Bob voiced, "The school district did a good job with the academy which helped to better prepare me if I make the jump to principal. I got to talk with principals at different levels." Gabe explained the academy as, "The Aspiring Principal's Academy is essential for those wishing to be a principal because it allows assistant principals to ask questions of current principals and make professional connections." Those who attended valued the activities and exposure to administrators outside of their building.

Mentoring. When assistant principals discussed development for the principalship, they described the role of mentoring as being an important aspect of their development. At the time of this study, the school district in the study did not officially assign assistant principals a mentor. The expectation that the principal would be a mentor to the assistant principal was voiced by majority of the participants. Participating assistant principals discussed the importance of having a good mentor, but not all of them believed they were given the opportunity to establish a successful relationship with their mentor. The assistant principals understood the time commitment of the principal's job

and voiced that the principal was always busy and having to adjust his or her schedule. When discussing the principal as a mentor, Adam said,

> I think I've had a good relationship with the principals I've worked with. I've had a lot of different style principals from hands off, lets you do want you want to do and kind of laissez-faire to whatever you do, I want to know what you're doing before you do it and after you do it, I want to know what happened. Some of them try to mentor you more than others.

Bob described that every principal he worked for established a mentoring relationship. The expectation from assistant principals is that the principal will serve in the capacity as mentor. He explained,

> Sometimes you got to just sit back and listen, and then as I mentioned before, you take a little piece from all of them and mix it up…but there's pieces and valuable lessons that I have learned from all of them, because all of them had so many different personalities.

Accordingly, Carl explained that he was fortunate to have worked for two excellent leaders. He described them as, "Both of them are excellent leaders and set a very good example and tone for the school, which made it very easy for assistants to follow their lead. The two principals that I've been under have been excellent role models."

For a mentorship to be successful, the assistant principals believed there must be some kind of trust between the mentee and the mentor. Beth described the relationship as, "I think trust is a huge part. I think trust and loyalty are big, those are the big ones because if you can't trust the admin team that you're working with, then you're just kind of out there floundering on your own." She went on to say that the principal is the one who empowers the assistant principal. Beth believed that the trust in the relationship was developed and nurtured by the principal. Dan shared a similar experience,

> I work for by far the best administrator that I could possibly work for. He is by far the best principal. The way he operates, the way he works with kids and teachers. He's very clear on what the expectations are and expects you to do

> those things. Definitely not a micro manager and very open to new ideas, trying new things. So we've got the freedom to grow as administrators and make decisions and feel very supported in those things. We have a large say in how things go because he's very open to listening to the things that we've got to say.

An overarching tone was that part of being a mentor is taking time to teach the assistant principal and offer him or her leadership experience. Frank described his relationship with his first principal as,

> My first principal was a good mentor. Very much middle school driven, I'd stay after school and we'd talk middle school philosophy because I hadn't been used to it, I only taught middle school for a year. So he sort of showed me the ropes and plus it was a strong administrative team.

Gabe had different experiences with the different principals he worked for. Different principals may have a different perception on the role the principal plays as a mentor for the assistant principal. He described his experiences as,

> I've had some different styles. My first principal was very much a take all the credit kind of principal…My second one I felt was fantastic, whereas not micromanaged so much, but very task oriented with deadlines. If you screwed something up, it was dealt with constructively, remedied, and as long as you didn't repeat the same thing again it was not a big deal. Third I worked with, very laid back, but very hands off in the sense that trusted you to do your job. As long as nothing crazy was brought to their attention everything was great. Fourth, just like the first, micromanager, but just again it's the I'm in charge person. What I say goes, and didn't like much input.

Similarly, when Ivan discussed his relationship with his principals he stated,

> Every principal I've ever worked with has had a major impact…If I was going to rate my principals from a zero to a ten, I'd give my first principal a five, my second principal a 10, my third principal a seven…I don't know people's agenda, and sometimes, and I'm not putting this by anybody's name, but sometimes you can tell when somebody's aspiring…is about themselves.

Ivan argued that some of his former principals were more worried about their own career advancement then assisting others interested in leadership roles. He believed he learned

the most from a couple of principals who took their time to teach and discuss the role of educational leader in school building.

An area of improvement mentioned by several participants was for principals to devote more of their time to mentoring their assistant principals. They understood principals are required to perform a multitude of tasks each day and that their schedule is busy and their day can include an abundance of paperwork while dealing with unexpected issues that arise during the school day, but assistant principals still expected time from the principal for guidance and support. Carl believed that principals needed to set aside required time for mentoring and developing assistant principals and that the school district should make it a requirement for principals. He stated, "Make it mandatory for principals to allocate a portion of the school year to train assistant principals in the specific requirements of their position. In addition, the principal must give assistant principals firsthand experience working with the school bookkeeper, athletic director, school sponsors, and booster clubs." Similarly, Dan explained that the principal needs to be given the opportunity to mentor his or her assistant principal by freeing up more of his or her time. He explained, "Today, the principal is overwhelmed with paperwork and dealing with the politics of the job. The principal does not have unencumbered time to devote to the development and mentoring of the assistant principal." Furthermore, Frank said, "School districts need to do a better job of providing mentoring and other support to prepare teachers and assistant principals for administration. Such a challenging transition requires additional time spent grooming for all the responsibilities of rookie administrators." Frank described his first principal as a mentor but also stated that the other principals he worked for did not set aside the time to

mentor assistant principals. It was at the principal's discretion within this school district on how and when he or she mentored assistant principals. Similarly, Ed stated, "More mentoring is needed to help the assistant principal have a clearer vision of the job of principal." Henry also stated, "More mentoring is needed because not all principals are good mentors nor do some take the time to mentor." Jim expressed the need for multiple mentors by stating, "AP's would be bettered served by working for multiple principals and having multiple mentors."

Summary

Chapter 4 concentrated on the results from my study regarding assistant principals' perspective on the principalship and their ability to ascend to the job of principal. The research questions were: What are the perceptions of veteran assistant principals as to why they have not ascended to the principalship or applied for the principalship? What perceived leadership experiences within the scope of assistant principal's daily work contribute or limit accession to the principalship? Five themes materialized from my data analysis: the first three themes – *deterrents to the principalship, mistakes and missteps during the assistant principalship,* and *school politics and impact on promotion* – answered Research Question 1, and the last two themes – *experiences needed for the principalship* and *assistant principal development and the principalship* – answered Research Question 2.

As assistant principals discussed their reasons for not ascending to the principalship, they conveyed the importance of their role as assistant principals to the success of the school. The assistant principals in this study expressed the complexity of their job and the variety of tasks they are required to complete. They realized that as their

own job has become more complex but so has the role of principal. The majority of the assistant principals expressed that a large portion of their day was spent dealing with student issues such as student discipline. They viewed many of their duties as managerial and believed them to be necessary for the school to function but not imperative towards their development for the principalship. Many argued that it was essential for any assistant principal wishing to move into the role of principal to have some experience with all duties, and most recognized instructional tasks as preparing them best for the principalship. However, for most participants a small amount of their time was spent on instructional tasks. Many of the assistant principals expressed that their role in the building and assigned tasks were delegated by the building principal. Some explained that the principal assigned tasks without input for the administrative team with the only guidance from the principal being the delegation of tasks. Others described their principals as providing needed leadership experiences with ongoing dialogue and constructive feedback. These assistant principals stated that they had a good relationship with their principal and felt comfortable asking for guidance or more leadership opportunities. Some participants argued that assistant principals needed to be vocal and advocate for more instructional tasks from their building principal.

For some participants, the various elements that have increased the complexity of the principalship became deterrents for applying for the position. Several voiced that the raise in pay from assistant principal to principal was not adequate within the school district. Others stated that the amount of time required to be a successful principal deterred them from applying. For others, there is still interest, but the degree of interest varies because all participants voiced that they were content in their current positions if

they are never given the opportunity to be a building principal. The participants were adamant that mentorship was imperative to their success and believed it was an area that could be improved. Several assistant principals adamantly believed that it could be improved through the principals having mandated time set aside specifically to mentor and develop assistant principals for the principalship. Lastly, all the assistant principals began their administrative career with the idea of one day becoming a building principal but for some that desire has diminished and for others it no longer exists.

Chapter 5: Results & Discussion

This research study focused on the perceived obstacles to applying or ascending to the principalship, as viewed through the lens of veteran secondary assistant principals. The idea of remaining an assistant principal for the conclusion of an administrator's career was the motivation behind this study. Each assistant principal told his or her story that described his or her professional and personal experiences within the schools. The examples and stories shared by each assistant principal brought insight into the role of the secondary assistant principal. During the study, several themes emerged that clarified my view of the obstacles that diminished application or opportunities for the principalship. I organized the participants' remarks into five major themes through a qualitative analysis of their transcripts. The five major themes that emerged from the data are the following: deterrents to the principalship, mistakes and missteps during the assistant principalship, school politics and impact on promotion, experiences needed for the principalship, and assistant principal development and the principalship. Each of these themes added an in-depth understanding to the two primary research questions driving this study: *(1) What are the perceptions of veteran assistant principals as to why they have not ascended to the principalship or applied for a principalship? (specifically reflecting on their past experiences, relationships, preparation, and events)?; (2) What perceived leadership experiences within the scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to or limit ascension to the principalship?* The previous chapter detailed the reflections, examples, and narratives shared by the 12 assistant principals included in this qualitative study. As their statements are compared and contrasted with the available scholarly literature on

this topic, it becomes evident that these educational leaders face many of the same challenges and partake in similar roles as their peers across the secondary school culture.

The following sections will summarize the answers to the research questions. The participants in the study provided descriptive details to paint a vivid picture of their daily roles and responsibilities as a secondary school assistant principal. They offered their own perceptions of their relationships with their principal and other administrators within their school district. They also discussed their readiness for the principalship and their desire for the job. This chapter consists of four sections. Section 1 delivers a summary of the outcomes from my research and data analysis. This provides an overview of my findings from data collection and analysis. Section 2 is the discussion of results and recommendations. This provides a comprehensive discussion of what was discovered as the assistant principals discussed their role, preparation for the principalship, and desire for the principalship. This section gives recommendations to the field of education and district officials concerning what can be done to aid assistant principals in preparing them for the job of principal and maintaining the job of principal as desirable. Section 3 provides recommendations for further research. This chapter closes with final thoughts regarding the state of the assistant principal's role and how it has influenced their decision to seek the principalship.

Summary of Findings

The twelve participants in this study had various years of experience ranging from seven years of experience to twenty one years of experience as an assistant principal with five assigned to a middle school and seven to a high school. All except for two of the

twelve assistant principals had attended the schools district's Aspiring Principal's Academy and applied at one time for the principalship within the district. All of the assistant principals entered administration with the aspiration of one day becoming a principal, but four participants no longer have interest in applying for the job. Several are beginning to question their desire for the principalship and if they will ever be promoted to principal.

School district expectations and the building principal can impact the school placement and specific duties of the assistant principal. Participants described leadership within the buildings they have worked and descriptions varied between participants. Majority described the principal as delegating tasks amongst the administrative team. Some explained situations requiring interdependency amongst the principal and assistant principal to accomplish the daily goals of a school building. However, when assistant principals mentioned phrases associated with distributed leadership it appeared that distributed leadership was more of a practice in some schools than a strategy. As assistant principals talked about their role and it influencing their decision to apply for the principalship or ascend to the principalship, assistant principals voiced their job as being demanding and challenging. When describing the job of principal, they stated the job as becoming increasingly complex with growing demands.

The first question asked was what are the perceptions of veteran assistant principals as to why they have not ascended to the principalship or applied for a principalship (specifically reflecting on their past experiences, relationships, preparation, and events)? With many principals following a similar career path, the assistant principalship is considered to be a stepping stone for future principals (Glanz, 1994;

Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Militello et al., 2015). The data showed many of the assistant principals did not perceive self-imposed obstacles as preventing them from promotion but instead perceive other obstacles as preventing them from promotion or applying for the job of principal. However, a few assistant principals did recognize self-imposed obstacles preventing promotion.

The data revealed there are various deterrents related to the job of principal. The assistant principals discussed the long hours required of the principal to be an effective leader. Today, the role of principal is multifaceted and complex (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Grubb & Flessa, 2006). The principal is the instructional leader of the school and is held accountable for their school's success (Rice, 2010). The expectation is for the principal to fill many roles: instructional leader, disciplinarian, property manager, community relations, mentor, school budget planner, parent liaison, and expert in school law (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Horong et al., 2010; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Viadero, 2009).

All of the participants understood the job was demanding, but many did not realize the time commitment required of the principal until they became assistant principals. Eckman (2004) stated principal candidates perceive the need to be like "superman" to meet the expectations of the principalship. Because the principal is the person in charge of the building, he or she must deal with any issues that come through the doors of the building (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Some of the participants believed the principal is required to work longer hours than in years past because of federal, state, and district mandates. Because principals are required to implement all mandates, the assistant principals expressed that the principal was inundated with paperwork. Assistant principals who had worked in schools that struggled with or did not make state

accreditation voiced that the time requirement of the principal increases because of the increasing needs of the students in low performing schools. Cranston (2007) postulated the idea of excessive paperwork and bureaucracy negatively impacting the aspiration of assistant principals to apply for the principalship. As assistant principals reflected on the long hours of the principalship, they recognized that it would require sacrificing time away from family and for some that was a sacrifice that they were not willing to make.

Another deterrent expressed by the assistant principals was the lack of a significant pay increase from assistant principal to principal within the district. Pijanowski et al. (2009) expressed the importance of maintaining an appropriate salary differential between principals, assistant principals, and teachers. The participants argued the principal was the leader of the school building and should be the highest paid employee in the building. They justified a greater pay increase because the principal is the person who is ultimately responsible for everything that takes place within the building and carries an abundance of stress. Lack of respect was another area of concern. Whitaker and Vogel (2005) revealed how the job of principal would be more desirable if principals believed they were respected and supported. Assistant principals discussed how the principalship used to carry grandeur and have autonomy to be the primary decision maker in their building. They expressed that the grandeur and autonomy no longer exist as the level of respect for the position has decreased. All the assistant principals entered administration with a desire to be promoted to the principalship; however, they stated the undesirables can cause them to lose interest or question the overall value of becoming a building principal.

The assistant principals also shared how their own mistakes can become an obstacle or prevent advancement to the principalship. Assistant principals are required to handle many tasks and accomplish them in a timely manner, which at times can cause stress and lead to mistakes or poor decision making. As they reflected on their past experiences, some recognized various missteps and considered them fatal to their career. One of the critical mistakes was becoming comfortable in the job as an assistant principal and reaching a level of complacency. The assistant principals voiced the importance of being exposed to a variety of experiences and requesting new challenges or experiences within the building or district when not presented with any. As assistant principals reflected on how they present themselves on the job, it was revealed that overconfidence can reflect badly on their own leadership skills and present them as not ready for the principalship. The assistant principals within this study stressed the importance of having a positive attitude and a willingness to learn from others. They stated that each experience was an opportunity to learn and further their development as administrators. Assistant principals described the school administrator as being held to high moral and ethical standards within the school and community. They expressed the importance of upholding these standards at all times because their career and advancement is dependent upon their positive image in the school community. Although the assistant principals understood the moral standard they are held to, a lapse in judgment can occur and did take place for one. The assistant principal regretted the critical mistake and considers it a defining moment in his career that he cannot recover from within the district.

The influence of school politics on principal hiring practices was considered by participants to be a reason for not ascending to the principalship. The assistant principals

discussed the idea of the school district having a pecking order for who was next to receive a principalship. They believed this pecking order was not solely based upon the skill set, knowledge, or experiences of the assistant principal but instead on which central office administrator or building principal was endorsing the assistant principal. Assistant principals also stated they were dependent upon having a positive relationship with their principal in order for the principal to endorse them as being ready for the principalship. Some assistant principals expressed the relationship they establish with the building principal as a determining factor for consideration for a principalship. Assistant principals expressed being at a disadvantage if they had a principal more interested in their own career advancement then teaching and mentoring them or if their principal was not as politically connected with central office administrators. They postulated that a damaged relationship with their principal negatively impacted their growth as an assistant principal and diminished the possibility of being considered for the principalship. Assistant principals further stated that a negative relationship with a principal decreased their desire for the principalship.

The second research question asked what perceived leadership experiences within the scope of assistant principals' daily work contribute to or limit ascension to the principalship? The data revealed the themes *experiences needed for the principalship* and *assistant principal development.* The assistant principals expressed their primary duties as being managerial but necessary for the school to function. Oleszewski et al. (2012) articulated that the responsibilities assigned to assistant principals are assigned by the building principal and the duties are managerial including student discipline, buses, substitutes, supervision, and teacher observations. The assistant principals described the

duties as being challenging, extensive, and time consuming. The most common duties were student discipline, textbooks, cafeteria duty, buses, content liaison, building manager, custodians, truancy, substitutes, supervision of school events, and classroom observations. As assistant principals reflected and made meaning of their tasks, they viewed tasks related to instruction as preparing them best for the principalship. They believed in having experience in all tasks but viewed instructional tasks as improving their credibility as an instructional leader. Oleszewski et al. (2012) expressed duties related to instructional leadership as being critical preparation for the principalship. As they discussed various instructional tasks, they expressed that they faced the challenge of not having enough time to effectively participate in instructional leadership because there was no balance between managerial and instructional tasks assigned to them. The overarching tone presented was one in which they spent the majority of their time on managerial and student issues. The assistant principals revealed that the inability to experience instructional opportunities negatively impacted their consideration for a principalship. Some of the participants explained that there were few opportunities to practice instructional leadership because their building principal delegated the duties and assigned them only managerial tasks. They expressed that there was no dialogue with the principal about assigned tasks and the only interaction was to ensure that tasks were completed. For some assistant principals, the characteristics of distributed leadership only existed in their building through structure and design with little interaction with the principal.

The assistant principals described assistant principal development as necessary preparation for the principalship. The 10 assistant principals that attended the Aspiring

Principal's Academy offered by the district discussed the experience as being critical to their development. As they described their experience with the academy, they appreciated the opportunity to network with various principals within the district. They viewed the academy as a necessary step towards the principalship within the district. The assistant principals explained how the district offers professional learning seminars on a variety of educational topics for administrators to provide them with the most pertinent information. They view these professional learning opportunities as a way to increase their knowledge and skill set. Assistant principals contended that professional learning seminars provided a platform for them to gain experience in areas they were lacking. An area of concern mentioned by assistant principals was discrepancies in the mentoring of assistant principals to prepare them for the principalship. Assistant principals expressed the job of principal as being multifaceted and busy. However, they stated their expectation was that the building principal would mentor them and prepare them for the principalship. They argued that mentoring was not a priority for all principals and the district did not have a strong mentoring program established for assistant principals. The assistant principals expressed how a strong mentor improved assistant principal development by providing necessary experiences and tutelage throughout the assistant principal experience.

Discussion of Results

Assistant principal job dimensions. As assistant principals reflected upon their job, they discussed that their job primarily consists of managerial tasks and dealing with student discipline. Assistant principals are restricted in their jobs by managerial duties which are assigned by the principal and can vary between schools (Militello et al., 2015).

These responsibilities assigned to assistant principals can include student discipline, cafeteria duty, buses, classroom observations, master schedule, textbooks, substitutes, lockers, custodians, truancy, supervising school activities, content liaison, athletics liaison, and building manager (Glanz, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Kwan, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Watson, 2005; Weller & Weller, 2002). The managerial roles of the assistant principalship do not maximize the potential of the assistant principal. To maximize the potential of the assistant principal, consideration must be given to the tasks in which assistant principals spend their time. Pounder and Crow (2005) recommended expanding the assistant principal role to include more instructional leadership as a way to improve quality of principal candidates. This suggest the role of the assistant principal needs to be reconceptualized by school districts so that the position can remain a stepping stone to the principalship. School districts need to carefully take into consideration the expectations, roles, and responsibilities of the assistant principal so that there can be consistency amongst the schools but still allow for schools to make adjustments for their school culture.

The assistant principals in this study recognized all their tasks as being important preparation for the principalship but identified instructional tasks as being critical. Oleszewski et al. (2012) emphasized the crucial role of instructional leadership as a primary area for assistant principal development. However, assistant principals are overwhelmed with managerial tasks and spend little time on instructional leadership tasks (Chan et al., 2003; Hausman et al., 2002; Kwan, 2009). The assistant principals within the study were open to the opportunity to be more involved with instructional leadership, but the managerial tasks hindered their development by requiring a majority of their time.

Principals and district leaders need to contemplate new ways to examine the administrative team and develop a work design that allows for assistant principals to spend more time on instructional leadership and put it into practice. Yu-kwong and Walker (2010) argued for school districts to provide assistant principals aspiring for the principalship opportunities to practice specific principal skills.

One way to allow assistant principals more opportunities to serve as instructional leaders is to implement a distributed leadership model that evenly divides the managerial and instructional tasks (Pounder & Crow, 2005). The distributive model would allow for many of the tasks in school to be co-performed and evenly distributed by the administrative team. This would allow assistant principals to maximize and enhance the skills needed to ascend to the principalship (Spillane, 2006). Additionally, the distributive model requires interaction which would require the principal and assistant principal to interact more frequently in hopes of building a stronger relationship. Neumerski (2013) discussed the importance of learning more about how instructional leadership is carried out within schools and recommended teaching instructional leadership through the distributed leadership model. Many schools only implement distributed leadership through design and structure. In doing so, their model is ineffective because the distributive model should concentrate on the actions and interactions between leaders and followers. The principal should guide and critique assistant principals on their leadership skills so that they may grow as a school leader. When the building principal interacts with the assistant principals it models for them distributed leadership by showing how to interact with others. Such a team model would not only lessen the principal's responsibilities, but it would provide assistant principals

with proper training for the principalship. Katz and Kahn (1978) articulated that shared leadership functions within an organization result in a more efficient use of the human resources available.

Formal mentoring. At the time of this study, the district in this study did not provide the assistant principals with any formal mentoring. The mentoring was supposed to be done by the building principal and implemented at the discretion of the principal. Recently, the district implemented a formal mentoring program for all first-year assistant principals. The assistant principals in this study expressed concern over the inconsistencies in the mentoring being provided. Daresh (2004) described the mentor as the most critical asset to the assistant principal. The assistant principals described the principal as an effective mentor when the principal took the time to guide and teach them through a variety of leadership experiences. The participants described the professional learning they received as necessary to develop their leadership skills but put a greater value on being given the opportunity to put to practice their leadership skills. By being able to practice and experience the various roles of the principal they were able to gain confidence and a greater understanding of the principalship. They also valued a principal who listened, supported them, and provided opportunities to gain experiences needed for the principalship. All principals need to be held accountable by districts for developing their assistant principals and providing them with a variety of job experiences that are essential to the job of principal. School districts should make the development of assistant principals a required responsibility and an area of evaluation for building principals. Marshall and Hooley (2006) explained that assistant principals need more than a list of tasks from the principal.

The district in the study did provide new assistant principals professional development through a cohort model comprised of first year assistant principals. This cohort held various professional development seminars taught by administrators within the district. The district also offered the Aspiring Principals Academy for assistant principals interested in ascending to the principalship. The assistant principals described the academy as an important step for ascension to the principalship. This cohort and academy did provide the assistant principals with professional development and networking; however, it did not provide them with a mentor who can listen and provide direction. Today, the school district in this study does offer first-year assistant principals a current assistant principal as a formal mentor.

Zepeda et al. (2012) expressed the importance of formal and informal mentoring when preparing assistant principals to succeed to the principalship. They believed that an assistant principal needed someone to guide them and show them what to do. The mentorship between assistant principal and principal needs to be re-examined on how it is conducted in districts because it has the ability to enhance the assistant principal's confidence and effectiveness as a leader when properly implemented (Wong, 2009).

A formal mentorship program should be provided for all assistant principals. This program should be tailored to prepare the assistant principal for their current job and prepare them for the job of principal. The program should include an assigned formal mentor who can listen and offer guidance as well as maintain confidentiality. Confidentiality will encourage the assistant principal to ask questions and help build a trusting relationship. A formal mentor can provide impartial advice, networking, and someone to encourage the assistant principal during times of uncertainty (Oleszewski et

al., 2012). The mentor should be someone who does not have the ability to hire or fire the mentee. School districts could consider using former retired principals from the district who have a record of molding assistant principals into successful principals. Also, mentors should be selected first by identifying who are good leadership models and have the ability to build trusting relationships. Retired district principals would offer an unbiased listener who can draw from past experiences to offer advice.

Furthermore, school divisions should offer ongoing professional learning for all principals on distributed leadership. The descriptions of interactions between assistant principals and their building principal within this study varied amongst the participants and for many of them they expressed that their principals had varying degrees of comfort when sharing leadership responsibilities with the administrative team. Some participants described shared leadership within their building as the principal assigning tasks to the assistant principals. They explained that the principal divided the tasks among the assistant principals with the only directive being the expectation that the task would be completed. There was little to no dialogue or interaction with the principal to help them improve their leadership skills. Other participants described their principal as being an inspirational leader who guided them as educational leaders offering constructive criticism along the way. Principals should be teaching, offering guidance and constructive criticism to their assistant principals throughout the school year. By offering criticism to assistant principals they have the opportunity to improve on areas of weakness.

Distributed leadership practice allows for principals to not only meet the demanding needs of their job, but to maximize the leadership skills of the assistant

principals. Spillane (2006) theorized distributed leadership as practices "stretched over the social and situational contexts of the school" (p. 5). He purposed that the interactions with leadership and followers within a school are the key to the distributed perspective. Harris (2003) also highlighted the impact of interactions between leaders and followers in distributed leadership believing that different types of interactions can produce improved patterns of activity. Harris believed that interdependency rather than a single leader was more productive for an organization. He argued that the main point of distributed leadership revolves around the various interactions that result in shared decisions. Shared decision making will provide assistant principals with a feeling of empowerment and confidence to self-advocate for more leadership roles.

Formal mentoring provides assistant principals with appropriate guidance and support needed for them to be successful and prepared to be promoted to principal. Along with formal mentoring, building principals need to be supported by central office with professional learning on distributed leadership. When principals utilize distributed leadership correctly within their building, their actions and interactions with their assistant principals model ideal school leadership. This allows for assistant principals to grow as educational leaders and develop the skills necessary to move into the role of principal. Also, as assistant principals participate in the elements of distributed leadership they develop the skills to distribute leadership to teachers and other staff members.

Seek new opportunities. A study conducted by Chan et al. (2003) revealed 80% of assistant principals desired to be promoted to the principalship at one point during their career. Assistant principals in this study stated being provided with experiences related

to the role of principal as being critical to their development. Many of the assistant principals were dependent upon the building principal to provide these experiences. Relaying on the principal solely to provide these experiences can be difficult because the job of principal has developed to the point that it is too multifaceted to define because of the many expectations, skills, and responsibilities that have become a part of the principalship (Catano & Stronge, 2007). Assistant principals need to take advantage of any opportunities offered and seek possible opportunities within the building, school district, and state. If district leaders are looking for effective educational leadership, the assistant principal must seek out opportunities and be proactive to require the skills necessary to be principal (Hartley, 2009). The assistant principals in the study argued large quantity of managerial tasks hindered their ability to gain instructional leadership opportunities. Assistant principals have to learn to be a better manager of their time. In this study, they did seek professional learning to address their own areas of weakness but professional learning does not offer an opportunity to practice skills. Assistant principals need to become their own advocates and pursue instructional tasks and other leadership experiences through all avenues. New opportunities give assistant principals the chance to showcase their talents and capability to district leaders. Seeking new opportunities shows district leaders initiative and a desire to ascend to the principalship. Lastly, assistant principals need to seek out feedback from their building principal and district leaders, especially if they are a veteran assistant principal with a desire to be promoted. This will give assistant principals the option to utilize the constructive feedback on areas of weakness so that they may take the necessary steps to becoming a highly qualified principal candidate.

Remaining as an assistant principal for the rest of their career is not something many of the participants envisioned when entering administration as assistant principals. Having the ability to self-advocate is something that assistant principals need to learn to do if they wish to be promoted to the principalship. They need to establish and build a relationship with their building principal so they may advocate for opportunities through the principal as they arise in and outside the school building. A positive relationship with their building principal will allow the assistant principal to comfortably self-advocate for needed experiences.

Recommendations for Further Research

While this study provided much needed research on the perceptions of veteran assistant principals for not applying or ascending to the job of principal, there are still areas in which research can be improved and expanded to increase preparedness of assistant principals for the principalship. In hindsight, the secondary interview was not necessary. The questions in the second interview could have been included in the first interview. This would have saved the participants' time and for future research it could possibly lead to receiving more interest from participants since they would not be asked to participate in two interviews. The idea behind the second interview was that it would provide more in-depth questioning after coding the first interview. However, after reflection those questions could have been included in the first interview and the protocol could have been to call any participant if further explanation or questioning was needed.

Several recommendations for further studies can be taken from this research. First, I only interviewed secondary assistant principals in one large school district in

Virginia. The study involved 12 participants from middle and high schools with seven or more years of experience as an assistant principal. I was rejected by another school district to conduct this study possibly because of the political, social, and cultural context of veteran assistant principals. A future study could include more than one school district and specifically look at smaller school districts. The school district in this study consisted of approximately 39,000 students and 17 secondary schools with a total of 61 assistant principals in urban and rural centers. At the time of the study there were 22 secondary assistant principals who met the criteria. Expanding the study to include smaller school districts would be advantageous in identifying structures, programs, philosophies and procedures. The perceptions of assistant principals in smaller districts could indicate differences in motivating factors and deterrents related to the job of principal. This perspective would provide data related to geography, populations, and demographics, and determine if they play a role in the ascension of assistant principals to the principalship.

This study used purposeful and snowball sampling to identify those assistant principals who met the studies criteria for veteran assistant principal. All participants had a minimum of seven years of experience as an assistant principal and were at the point of questioning if they would ever ascend to the principalship. Future studies must be conducted to identify the perceptions of newly appointed assistant principals on applying and ascending to the principalship. Specifically considering the implications of the newly appointed assistant principal's relationship with their principal for their decision to pursue the job of principal is another area of research. This will provide insight on what is effective, what is ineffective, and possible solutions for principal preparation. Districts

and building principals will be able to gain understanding on what assistant principal induction looks like and its effectiveness as well as being able to understand their role and perceptions of the principalship.

This study focused on veteran secondary assistant principals and excluded elementary assistant principals because the secondary assistant principalship is unique in design and structure. At many middle and high schools, there are multiple assistant principals on the administrative team with the tasks being divided and delegated by the building principal. Whereas, at the elementary level it is common to find one assistant principal responsible for all the tasks but on a smaller scale. Examination of assistant principals by school levels such as elementary, middle, and high should be pursued by future researchers to determine if differences in school levels effect assistant principal perceptions for applying or ascending to the principalship. It would also give further insight into the differences in the role of the assistant principal at the various levels and the influence these differences have on desire and preparation for the principalship. Additionally, of the twelve participants, only two were female. I would have liked a more diverse research participant pool, and I think with more females, there may have been more examples of gender differences in responses. By including elementary assistant principals the number of possible female participants could have increased.

The assistant principals were willing to share what they believe their role or identity is within the school division. Participants discussed how school politics, culture, and experiences impacted their possibility of promotion and consideration to apply for the principalship. Ultimately, the participants were sharing their subjectivity by describing their experiences, beliefs, biases, thoughts, and desires that have shaped their

identity as a veteran secondary assistant principal. Future research could be conducted on assistant principals' subjectivity; how they view themselves in context to their school division. This research would give greater insight into the role of the assistant principal and how their subjectivity is shaped through their position within the school division. Each participant's subjectivity would be unique to their perceptions of their experiences within the school division. Understanding a participant's subjectivity would require the researcher to develop an interview protocol that requires participants to share how their subjectivity was shaped as an assistant principal. The researcher would have to probe the participants to go deep into how their perspective of themselves as an assistant principal developed.

Final Thoughts

Researchers and educational literature is more concentrated on the principalship than the role of assistant principal (Oleszewski et al., 2012; Wong, 2009). As the principalship continues to become more demanding and multifaceted, it is imperative for educational leaders to understand and be more proactive in preparing assistant principals to move into the principalship (Cranston, 2007; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Horong, et al., 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2013; Viadero, 2009). Furthermore, educational leaders have a duty to ensure the job of principal is desirable for quality applicants (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). This study focused on veteran secondary assistant principals' perspective on reasons for not applying or ascending to the job of principal. As assistant principals told their stories, they described themselves as entering administration with the aspiration of one day becoming a building principal. They expressed their role as being more managerial than instructional leader; with student discipline requiring a large

amount of their time. If assistant principals are expected to continue performing these roles, district administrators and principals need to devise a plan to maximize their growth as instructional leaders. Spillane (2006) expressed that it is not that leadership is distributed, but how leadership is distributed that makes impactful change. Principals can achieve this by being deliberate with their actions and interactions with assistant principals instead of implementing distributed leadership only by delegating tasks. By implementing a true distributed leadership perspective, principals can restructure the traditional roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal to better prepare them to become principal. For leadership to be transformational, leaders needs to be willing to invest in and empower others (Spillane, 2006).

When interviewing assistant principals it is essential to recognize the power structure that exists in schools. Foucault (1982) stated, "The exercise of powers is not simply a relationship between partners, individuals or collective; it is the way in which certain actions modify others (p. 788). Foucault argued that conformity exists in schools and people within the schools setting learn how to behave in expected ways. He insisted that the norms that are present in school structure are so embedded that they cannot be perceived by those within. This includes assistant principals and the existing power structure within the school. The power structure and design will influence how assistant principals perceive their position.

Harris (2006) postulated that the principal is ultimately responsible for how power is distributed within the school. The way in which the principal exercises power within the building will impact the relationship assistant principals. Assistant principals having the knowledge and ability to self-advocate is part of the power structure in schools. Their

comfort and cognition of how to appropriately self-advocate is dependent upon the exercise of power within the school. Principals empower the work of assistant principals and other school leaders through their actions and interactions. Foucault (1982) stated, "I wish to suggest that one must analyze institutions from the standpoint of power relations (p. 791). As researchers study the assistant principalship it is imperative that they identify power and how power is exercised within the school system.

In researching from a constructivist view, I have been able to make meaning of what assistant principals experience in their role. Because education and its demands are evolving and the accountability is increasing, the assistant principal's job should be reconsidered and redefined. If instructional leadership is the priority for ascension to the principalship and high quality instruction the goal of schools, redefining the roles of assistant principals should take precedent. This qualitative study possesses the elements of transferability. This study was limited to 12 veteran secondary assistant principals' perspective from one large school district within Virginia. Methodically, a researcher can utilize what was done to replicate the study; however; creating a larger qualitative study and using veteran secondary assistant principals from multiple locations and demographics is necessary to decide if the findings of this study can be generalized.

Lastly, participants found comfort in me being an assistant principal, and it allowed them to be honest about their experiences. The dialogue between the participants and me felt genuine and relaxed. They voiced that there is little interest in the assistant principal experience and viewed this study as an opportunity to shed light on their job. As a fellow assistant principal, I take great honor in sharing their stories as a possible way to bring about reconceptualization of the position. As principals retire, it will be

critical to replace them with highly qualified candidates. These candidates need to be equipped to handle the complex job of principal and have experienced as much of the role as possible before taking over a school. The assistant principalship offers school districts a mold in which they have the ability to shape and transform assistant principals into transformational school leaders. Potentially, the role of assistant principal can offer invaluable experiences for future principals that cannot be simulated through professional learning. From a distributed perspective, leadership is disseminated through the interaction of the principal and assistant principals. These interactions can result in assistant principals building a positive relationship with the principal, attaining leadership skills, feeling empowered, and gaining confidence needed to be promoted to principal. However, distributed leadership only offers a framework to access the talents and thoughts of assistant principals. It is not the answer to all of the issues that exist with the assistant principalship. As educational leadership positions continue to grow and become more multifaceted, it is critical for schools divisions to be proactive in developing assistant principals into effective school leaders.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Assistant Principal,

I am a doctoral candidate at The George Washington University in the process of conducting educational research as part of my requirement to earn my doctoral degree. I am conducting a study under the direction of Dr. Jennifer K. Clayton, Associate Professor. My study will explore assistant principals' perceptions for not attaining or applying for a principalship. This study will contribute to the body of literature on the assistant principalship and specifically the perceived experiences that prepare or limit assistant principals for the principalship. I am inviting you to participate in my study which includes a questionnaire and two semi-structured interviews that will be audio taped and transcribed. The first interview will be scheduled for 60 minutes and the second interview will be scheduled for 30 minutes on the phone.

Should you decide to participate, I will contact you to set up time for the interviews. Your participation is voluntarily and I will make all arrangements for interviews at your convenience. At the first interview, I will present an Informed Consent form, in which I will only need verbal consent. I will also ask you to take a very short questionnaire. At the end of the first interview, the second interview will be scheduled. The second interview will be scheduled for two weeks after the first interview and will be conducted on the phone. Your response will remain confidential, and you will play a role in the accuracy of your responses throughout the process. Your participation is voluntarily; and your employment status will not, in any way, be affected should you choose not to participate or if you decide to withdraw from the study at any time.

I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or via email. You may reply to this email as well. If additional information is needed, please feel free to contact me. Thank you in advance for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Christopher H. Vail

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Participant # _____

Gender: _____ Male / _____ Female

Age: _____

Ethnicity:

_____ Hispanic or Latino: A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. The term "Spanish orgin" can be used in addition to "Hispanic or Latino."

Race:

_____ American Indian or Alaska Native: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.

_____ Asian: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

_____ Black or African American: A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Terms such as "Haitian" or "Negro" can be used in addition to "Black or African America."

_____ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guan, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

_____ White: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

Professional Background

1. **How many years have you been in education? Teaching _____ Assistant Principal _____**
2. **How many of those years have been in this school district? _____**
3. **How many of those years have been in this school? _____**
4. **Current grade level? _____ Middle _____ High School**
5. **Aspirations to become a principal? _____ Yes _____ No _____ Undecided**

School Information

1. **Number of students _____**
2. **Total number of teachers _____**
3. **Total number of assistant principals _____**

Appendix C: Interview 1 Questions

Interview Protocol

Interview #1

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this qualitative study. Before we get started, I would like to offer you a general overview of today's interview. This is the first of two interviews. Any follow-up questions will be done through a phone conversation. Today we will focus on your journey into administration as well as details pertaining to your role as assistant principal. As a reminder, you are free to refrain from answering any question or stop at any time during the interview. Before we get started, I would like to ask your permission to audiotape our discussion today.

Interview 1 (Background History/Details of Experience)

1. Discuss your journey into administration.
2. How did you come to be an assistant principal?
3. Describe your first few years as an assistant principal.
4. Describe your relationship with the various principals you have worked with.
5. Describe your primary duties as an assistant principal.
6. What duties do you perceive as preparing you for the principalship?
7. How prepared do you think you are for the principalship due to your experience as an assistant principal?
8. Have you ever applied for a principalship? Why or why not

Appendix D: Interview 2 Questions

Interview Protocol

Interview #2

Once again, I would like to thank you for participating in this study. Before we start I would like to give a brief overview of today's interview. This interview is the second and final interview. Any follow-up questions will be in the form of e-mail or through a phone conversation.

Today we will continue our discussion of your experience as an assistant principal as well as reflect on your role as assistant principal. As a reminder, you are free to pass on any question or stop at any time during the interview. Before we start, I would like to ask your permission to audio tape our discussion today.

Interview 2 (Details of Experience/Reflection on Meaning)

1. In what ways, if any, can school districts improve upon preparing assistant principals for the principalship?

2. How has your opinion of the principalship changed from the time you obtained your first assistant principal position?

3. How do you envision the ideal principalship?