

ELEMENTARY ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE

by

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(Under the Direction of Jo Blase)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore elementary assistant principals' perspectives on their instructional leadership role and assess those perspectives in light of current research on instructional leadership. The study was guided by a symbolic interactionist framework. Data were collected in elementary schools that employed instructional assistant principals. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted, audio-taped, and transcribed. Constant comparative analysis was then used to generate theoretical ideas explaining elementary assistant principals' perspectives on their instructional leadership role.

Findings from the study indicated that for assistant principals, being an instructional leader meant collaborating, supporting teachers, building trust, and being accessible. Assistant principals' instructional leadership work was influenced by early leadership experiences; principals' practices; local, state, and federal mandates; management duties; faculty and staff; and personal motivation. The strategies used by participating assistant principals included monitoring, commitment, sharing knowledge, and providing resources.

Based on the findings, five theoretical ideas emerged: (a) the principal determines the type of instructional leadership that an assistant principal demonstrates; (b) external influences, in the form of mandates, hinder assistant principals by forcing attention toward programs and paperwork and away from an instructional focus; (c) positive school climate and behaviors of assistant principals enhance the learning environment; (d) assistant principals' role socialization into leadership emerges while serving in an informal leadership capacity as a teacher prior to obtaining the administrative position; and (e) assistant principals are driven by their desire to help students learn and will do what is necessary to see students achieve.

Implications for principals, school systems, and future research are discussed. Principals should examine their own leadership behaviors and ensure they are providing assistant principals with clearly defined instructional leadership responsibilities. This distribution of instructional leadership should include all potential leaders. School systems should examine the tasks and demands placed on instructional assistant principals and focus on practices centered around learning and achievement. Additionally, the assistant principalship should be professionalized through ongoing, relevant training that meets the needs of the complex position. Lastly, this topic is open to future research; the connection between the assistant principals and school effectiveness should be explored.

INDEX WORDS: Assistant Principal, Instructional Leadership

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iv |
| CHAPTER | |
| 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Literature Review | 2 |
| Purpose | 10 |
| Research Questions | 10 |
| Theoretical/Conceptual Framework | 10 |
| Assumptions | 11 |
| Definitions of Terms | 12 |
| Limitations and Strengths..... | 12 |
| Significance of the Study | 13 |
| Organization of the Study..... | 13 |
| 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE | 14 |
| School Effectiveness | 15 |
| Laws and Policies in Georgia Defining the Assistant Principal..... | 17 |
| Instructional Leadership..... | 27 |
| Development of the Role of Assistant Principal | 34 |
| The Assistant Principalship | 40 |
| Summary | 51 |

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 3 | METHODOLOGY | 52 |
| | Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism..... | 54 |
| | Epistemology: Constructionism | 55 |
| | Site and Sample Selection | 56 |
| | Data Collection..... | 59 |
| | Data Analysis | 62 |
| | Credibility..... | 67 |
| | Summary | 70 |
| 4 | FINDINGS..... | 71 |
| | Participants' Individual Profiles | 71 |
| | Common Themes | 81 |
| 5 | SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS | 151 |
| | Summary of the Study..... | 151 |
| | Discussion | 153 |
| | Implications | 164 |
| | REFERENCES | 169 |
| | APPENDICES | |
| | A RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FORM..... | 181 |
| | B INTERVIEW GUIDE | 183 |
| | C COMMON THEMES AS REPORTED BY INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS | 184 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Leadership has emerged as an important concept in school reform during the past ten years (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leighton, 1996). Effective leadership is more significant than ever due to the pressure on schools to perform (Johnsen, 2003). Furthermore, today's schools are more demanding and complex and require a more "sophisticated set of skills and understandings than ever before" to be effective (Lambert, 1998, p. 24).

Traditional research in the area of instructional leadership has considered principals to have the most influence in education (Gorton & Kattman, 1985; Keefe & Jenkins, 1991; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987). In *The Man in the Principal's Office*, Wolcott (1973) demonstrated the myriad duties and demands placed upon principals. However, if the strength of an organization resides in its capacity for broad-based participative leadership (Lambert, 1998), then schools must be careful not to become overly dependent on the principal to encourage progress (Gonzalez, Glasmann, & Glasmann, 2002; Schmoker, 1999). Realistically, principals cannot be held solely accountable for all instructional leadership responsibilities. Administrators need to share leadership in order to create a motivating climate that positively affects students (Blase & Blase, 2003; Smylie & Denny, 1990). In order for schools to reach maximum effectiveness, the administration must adopt a team approach to leadership, especially one that includes and values the assistant principal (Gorton, 1987).

This declaration, however, does not address how assistant principals can or should fit into the instructional leadership role. Even though added burdens have been placed on principals and

a call exists for empowering educators to accept leadership roles (Blase & Blase, 1999), elementary assistant principals have received little mention in the professional literature (Gorton & Kattman, 1985). Indeed, the assistant principal is usually affirmed as an important performer in schools (Reed & Conners, 1982), but little has been documented about what exactly assistant principals do as instructional leaders, the consequences of their role on the work of other school participants, and their own perceptions related to instructional leadership (Greenfield, Marshall, & Reed, 1996). Although it is frequently suggested that an assistant principalship affords individuals the opportunity to exercise instructional and curriculum knowledge and skills, the reality of the position is often quite different (Kriekard & Norton, 1980; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987). Most of their work seems to be custodial and managerial in nature (Koru, 1993; Marshall, 1992).

Clearly, the position of the assistant principal offers individuals little opportunity to engage in instructional leadership; more importantly, the assistant principal's perspective of his/her own role in the school building is often not that of an instructional leader. In this qualitative study conducted in a metro Atlanta school district, elementary assistant principals' perceptions were explored in the context of current research on instructional leadership.

Literature Review

Researchers have generated different sets of descriptions that characterize effective schools, but one variable appears on all lists: the leadership of the administration (McEwan, 1998; Rossow, 1990). For a long time, effective principals have been viewed simply as good managers, suffering from too much management and too little leadership, leaving them deficient in purpose, direction, shared vision, and activities related to their jobs (Leighton, 1996). In today's schools, most people would include strong leadership on their list of attributes of

successful schools. Leighton (1996) identified five general categories for sustaining leadership reform in the study *The Role of Leadership in Sustaining School Reform: Voices from the Field*: (a) partnership and voice, (b) visions and values, (c) knowledge and daring, (d) savvy and persistence, and (e) personal qualities. School administrators acting as instructional leaders are seen as individuals who value those traits. They can achieve mastery in these categories by directly assisting teachers, building team morale among members of their staff, providing meaningful staff development, developing a research-based curriculum, and involving staff members in action research (Blase & Blase, 2003).

Barth (1990) stated, “The quality of the educational program depends on the school principals. The principal is the most important reason why teachers grow or are stifled on the job and is the most important factor in determining school climate” (p. 21). With a huge number of principals retiring within the next two decades (Marshall, 1993) and 80 percent of assistant principals reporting that they hope one day to become principals (Marshall, Mitchell, Gross, & Scott, 1992), the work and role of the assistant principal is a topic that must be examined.

We see that current duties of assistant principals are historically linked to practices and unexamined notions of the past (Glanz, 1994). However, the actual roles taken on by those second in command often defy common expectations (Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1995). It is important that instructional leaders, including assistant principals, have competencies that are necessary for success in their field (Calabrese, Short, & Zepeda, 1996). Attempts have been made to define the role of assistant principals through competencies, but the problem with this task is the limited attention directed toward studying the significance of the administrative role in education (Gorton, 1987; Kriekard & Norton, 1980). What seems to be needed is a redefinition

of the assistant principal's role with an emphasis on more involvement in instructional and curricular improvement (Dennard, 1993; Gorton & Kattman, 1985).

Currently, many forces are uniting to demonstrate how the assistant principalship has outgrown its traditional purpose as a stepping-stone to the principalship. Reduced administrative mobility and the closing of under-enrolled schools increased the length of time assistant principals remained in their positions in the 1970s and 1980s (Gross, Shaprio, & Mechan, 1980). However, more recent educational statistics indicate that the number of principals and assistant principal positions are increasing (Cantwell, 1993) and that the jobs encompass more responsibilities than ever (Frazier, 2002; Glanz, 1994; Koru, 1993).

The task most often viewed as the primary responsibility of the assistant principal at the middle and secondary level is that of disciplinarian (Cantwell, 1993; Frazier, 2002; Smith, 1987; Worner & Stokes, 1987). At the elementary level, however, the assistant principal role seems to focus on tasks that principals do not like to spend their time doing (Hess, 1985), such as organizational tasks (Marshall, 1992). The problem with the current system of assigned tasks concerns accountability. With local school policies, recent reports, and federal and state laws such as *No Child Left Behind* (2002), *A+ Reform* (2000), *Nation at Risk* (1983), researchers must examine the leadership system currently in place. All administrators are being held accountable for student achievement, and this accountability increasingly results in transfers, demotion, salary decreases, or in extreme circumstances, job loss (Marshall, 1985).

Many assistant principals enter school administration because of a desire to help students, teachers, and parents and to exercise school leadership (Cornell, 2003; Gorton & Kattman, 1985). In addition to the people skills they possess, they often bring as much educational, academic, and professional experience in school administration to the job as the principal and, in

some instances, a higher level of academic training and a respectable number of years of on-the-job experience (Panyako & Rorie, 1987; Venditti, 2002). Frequently, conflicts exist within the system that make it difficult for the educators in the assistant principal role to use and demonstrate their skills. No one quite understands the complexities and the dilemmas within the assistant principals' role (Marshall, 1992). Even though the title *instructional leader* often follows the title *assistant principal*, many of the specific tasks associated with having a direct influence on instruction must take a backseat to the everyday occurrences that demand immediate attention of the organization: paperwork deadlines, student discipline, and lunchroom supervision (Kelly, 1987). These tasks take precedence over an informal observation or a hallway discussion, for instance, regarding the shortcomings of the new reading program.

Unfortunately, few notice or respect the person and position of assistant principal or the critical processes required to fill the position effectively (Marshall, 1992). Many believe assistant principals merely to be subordinate to the principal, their real purpose being to alleviate problems and to make the job of the principal easier (Dennard, 1993; Kriekard & Norton, 1980; Smerka, 1980). Although much research exists relating to the principal role, the "assistant" is misunderstood. While the assistant principal is usually recognized by principals, teachers, parents, and students as important in the day-to-day operation and management of the school, there are a limited number of studies focusing on the individual and the position, particularly at the elementary school level. Often it is even difficult to locate a definitive job description for the assistant principal (Black, 1980). This highly skilled and trained individual is frequently given tasks technical in nature (Hartzell et al., 1995; Koru, 1993; Toth & Siemaszko, 1996) and outside the main objective of the education system, which is to afford children the best possible education.

Even though, traditionally, assistant principals have been viewed as “assistants” to the principals, by trusting their “second in command,” principals can begin empowering assistant principals to be risk-takers (Greenfield et al., 1986). In order to maximize organizational effectiveness, principals and assistant principals can cooperate as a team rather than operating in a power-over relationship (Gorton, 1987). This cooperation could be viewed by faculty and staff members as strong leadership that enables them to perform their respective roles effectively. For example, Johnsen (2003) found, in his study of the principal/assistant principal relationship, that there is inherent value in the relationship and that the actions of principals send strong messages to assistant principals regarding the role of administrators in schools. School administrators must maintain a balanced relationship with one another (Iannacone & Podorf, 1984), especially the principal and assistant principal.

With regard to the relationship between the principal and assistant principal, the fact that assistant principals are often hired by the district office rather than by the individual principal can affect the status of their relationship. The principal may often commission duties that result in dissatisfaction for the assistant principal (Panyako & Rorie, 1987). According to Greenfield (1985b), such tasks—not mandatory for improving instruction or the organization—can frustrate the assistant principal. Greenfield’s research suggests the need to redefine the roles of the assistant principal.

The reasons an assistant principal may not be given the opportunity to practice those skills needed to be an effective principal include role conflict and role ambiguity. One feels powerless when one attempts to accomplish a task without the authority to complete it (Calabrese & Adams, 1987; Cornell, 2003). An absence of delineation of duties and way of measuring outcomes from accomplishment of tasks adds to this ambiguity (Potter, 1980). For

example, an assistant principal's responsibility may not include hiring substitute teachers but may include dealing with the problems that occur when a substitute is not competent (Marshall, 1992).

Some school systems provide a written, formal job description to all individuals new to the assistant principal position. Other school systems leave the task of creating a job description up to the principal of the particular school (Kelly, 1987). In either case, the list does not seem to be inclusive and can be negatively affected by the inherent values of the principal (Panyako & Rorie, 1987). Assistant principals also have other responsibilities that must be attended to in addition to handling the many jobs outlined in these job descriptions. As a typical school day progresses, they complete a multitude of tasks that range from evaluating a teacher to investigating a minor school bus accident, from processing new textbooks to celebrating a teacher's birthday, from walking a nervous new student to her classroom to delivering keys to a substitute teacher (Marshall, 1993). These demands, which occur on a daily basis, are often barriers to their other professional tasks concentrating on curriculum development and instruction. Furthermore, the assistant principal attending to instructional tasks will be forced to shift into a managerial role due to the everyday unexpected tasks that emerge. The various jobs one is responsible for have to be prioritized; as a result, urgent routine tasks sometimes overshadow important instructional ones: "Role ambiguity with regard to assistant principals is why their roles and duties include many gray areas—ill-defined, inconsistent, and at times incoherent responsibilities, roles, and resources" (Marshall, 1992, p. 6).

By nature of the structure of schools, role conflict exists. Assistant principals must maintain the organization by completing certain managerial functions while being expected to assist teachers in professional and instructional growth. According to Glickman, Gordon, and

Ross-Gordan (1998), in order to engage in clinical supervision successfully, teachers must have a non-evaluative relationship. Unfortunately, this non-judgmental feedback is difficult to provide. Marshall (1993) studied these role conflicts. Collegial relationships, which are important to the strength of the instructional program (Blase, 1993), are often damaged by the evaluation role of the assistant principalship.

Historically, assistant principals have been viewed as those in an apprenticeship for the coveted job of principal. According to Austin and Brown (1970), "Tradition has long held that a principal must suffer, if only briefly, the office of the assistant principalship in order to qualify for this higher post" (p. 77). But researchers often question whether an assistant principalship qualifies an individual to be a strong principal. Although some of the experience obtained as assistant principal is helpful preparation for the principalship, that experience is not all-encompassing (Kelly, 1987). Additional skills and training are needed: "Assistant principalship is poor training ground for the principalship" (Worner & Stokes, 1987). With regard to the building-level culture, does being an assistant principal properly prepare one for the principalship? Are enough opportunities provided to ensure that one has obtained adequate training to advance to the next level? Glanz (1994) conducted a survey of 200 New York City assistant principals and concluded that the assistant principalship had not changed much since its inception and that the assistant principalship was not offering adequate training for becoming a principal due to the position's current duties and responsibilities. Although the assistant principalship is not necessarily effective training for the principalship, assistant principals are considered in "training" for the chief executive officer positions of the schools. They have yet to obtain the experience necessary to be principals but eagerly await the opportunity to prove themselves. Marshall (1992) stated, "Gandhi, Jane Addams, and Martin Luther King would not

have survived assistant principalhood; moving into higher leadership would have been out of the question, because the practice of the office cripples an individual's ability to think like a critical humanist" (p. 110).

However, for some, the assistant principalship is the highest position they desire, and they embrace the "career position" (Iannacone & Podorf, 1984, p. 116). Not every individual desires the pressure and ultimate responsibility of being a principal; in such cases, the assistant principalship is not intended to be the ramp to the principalship. At the same time, the skills needed to carry out the job of assistant principal effectively are specialized. General training as a school administrator is insufficient. Yet an alternate training program is not available for the assistant principal. The courses and preparation programs provided for assistant principals at the graduate level and district level are the same as those for principals. Therefore, the experience the assistant principal receives on the job is of utmost importance. While working in a school, they should be provided the opportunity to demonstrate leadership abilities. Since Austin and Brown's 1970 study, several researchers have focused on the lengthy training involved in being an assistant principal that helps one practice many tasks within the job description: (a) curriculum developer, (b) school budget administrator, (c) building and grounds supervisor, (d) recruiter and interviewer, (e) staff performance evaluator and supervisor, (f) parent and community liaison, (g) schoolwide and districtwide policy implementor, (h) transportation supervisor, (i) food service management, (j) disciplinarian, (k) textbook coordinator, (l) scheduler, (m) staff development coordinator, and (n) special programs sponsor (Bush, 1997; Dennard, 1993). But the beliefs and attitudes about and the value of those tasks as seen by those serving as assistant principals are rarely discussed.

The wide gap between research and practice suggests that some significant barriers are keeping school administrators from actually *doing* on a daily basis what is most effective in achieving academic results in America's schools. If we want to see a new generation of leaders in our schools who can actually lead us to improved results, then we must adjust the system to expedite such leadership (Schmoker, 1999). "All education leaders, but particularly the assistant principals, serving in that unique position, which often bridges the gap between management and faculty, may well be the most effective educational leaders to spearhead a rededication to positive action" (Clements, 1980, p. 15).

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to explore elementary assistant principals' perspectives of their roles as instructional leaders and assess those perspectives in light of current research on instructional leadership.

Research Questions

Given the purpose stated above, this study was guided by the following questions:

1. What does it mean to assistant principals to be an instructional leader?
2. In what ways, if any, are the actual duties and responsibilities of assistant principals congruent with the literature of instructional leadership?
3. What facilitates and/or hinders the assistant principal from exercising instructional leadership?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Based on Crotty's (1998) description of a theoretical framework, the social science research most commonly identified with is research that seeks to understand. In this study, the researcher will attempt to comprehend and interpret perspectives of assistant principals as

instructional leaders. The theory of symbolic interactionism will guide this examination.

Interaction among people is imperative to educating others and sharing knowledge; meaning for individuals occurs through interacting with others, and those experiences and interpretations shape people's views and behaviors. This researcher agrees with the assumptions central to the perspective of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969):

1. People act on things that have meaning for them.
2. This meaning is derived from the interaction with others.
3. Things are handled through a person's interpretations.

These concepts guided the research approach of this study.

The goal of this research was inquiry and understanding. What has been learned from observation and interviews will be shared with the community of administrators. The researcher hopes that readers will regard the outcomes of the research as helpful in improving the atmosphere in other schools by utilizing the assistant principal in a manner consistent with instructional leadership. By shedding light on the perspectives, barriers, and adversities an assistant principal faces, we will continue to develop this role as imperative to the success of a school's instructional program.

Assumptions

Assumptions made by the researcher for purposes of this study include the following:

1. Assistant principals who act directly or indirectly as instructional leaders will honestly respond about their beliefs, attitudes, and values.
2. The role of instructional leadership performed by assistant principals impacts classroom instruction.

Definitions of Terms

1. *Instructional Leadership* is a role in which one attends to the issues of instruction and curriculum, supervision, teacher evaluation, and management (Acheson & Gall, 1997). The instructional leader facilitates the development and guidance of academic goals, allocates resources effectively, and uses test data to evaluate curricular programs (Heck & Marcoulides, 1993). Through knowledge of current research on best practices for content and methodology, the instructional leader provides credible supervision and valid evaluation of programs and staff.
2. *Assistant Principal* is a local school administrator, working with the principal, who is trained and experienced in various teaching methods, as well as local, state, and federal policies, curriculum, and instruction. Critical to the organization, the position is frequently viewed as the entry-level position for administrative careers (Marshall, 1992).
3. *Perspective* is a coordinated set of ideas and actions a person uses in dealing with some problematic situation, a person's ordinary way of thinking and feeling about and acting in such a situation.
4. *Role* is the function of a position within an organization.

Limitations and Strengths

One limitation of this qualitative study is its representativeness. A strength of this study is its focus on elementary assistant principals' instructional leadership; an in-depth description of perceptions of elementary assistant principals' instructional leadership has been generated from the data collected.

Significance of the Study

Research conducted on elementary assistant principals is lacking, specifically research about their perceptions of their instructional leadership role. The results of this study should contribute to the knowledge base in educational administration and leadership. Furthermore, the findings of this study should have significance for both district-level faculty and school practitioners. The identification of elementary assistant principals' perceptions of instructional leadership should help define the assistant principal position more clearly. This reassessment could assist individual schools, school districts, and universities in creating or refining preparation programs. School systems may recognize current practices that are inhibiting assistant principals as instructional leaders; as a result, school leaders can begin identifying ways to use assistant principals' time more effectively. Participants in this study benefitted from reflecting on how they felt about their position. Having examined their own perceptions about instructional leadership and the current roles and barriers that exist for those roles, they can continue to grow professionally.

Organization of the Study

This chapter has introduced the context and purpose of this study. Chapter 2 reviews extant literature on educational leadership, including ideas and theories that have surfaced over the past several decades. It also presents research that has been done on local school leaders, specifically principals and assistant principals. Chapter 3 provides a complete description of the methodology for this study, including a review of symbolic interactionism, information on the district and individual selection process, a description of the research setting, and a discussion of data collection procedures. Findings based on the data are presented in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 provides a discussion of those findings with conclusions and implications.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 2 presents the historical development of instructional leadership relative to the assistant principal. Findings from various studies provide the framework for the content of this project. This review of the literature focuses on the following topics:

1. School Effectiveness
2. Laws and Policies in Georgia Defining the Assistant Principalship
3. Instructional Leadership
4. Development of the Role of Assistant Principal
5. The Assistant Principalship

The limited number of studies conducted about assistant principals indicates that the reasons people originally pursue the role, what occurs after acquiring the job, and why people remain in the position are not understood fully. Lack of understanding is partly due to the ongoing change the position has encountered. From “principal assistant” to “lead teacher” to “principal in training,” a definitive job description does not exist. When a job description does exist, it is not inclusive and often carries a large number of non-instructional-related duties. With the current pressure on schools to perform, instructional issues are more important than ever because all administrators are being held accountable for student achievement, and this accountability will continue to increase (Johnsen, 2003; Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Wirt, 2004).

The primary purpose of this study was to explore elementary assistant principals' perspectives of their roles as instructional leaders and assess those perspectives in light of current research on instructional leadership.

School Effectiveness

Theories of school effectiveness are numerous and reach back several decades. The variables that are believed to have started the school effectiveness movement are (a) strong administrative leadership, (b) high expectations for student achievement, (c) an orderly environment conducive to learning, (d) an emphasis on basic skill acquisition, and (e) frequent monitoring of student progress (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). According to Sergiovanni et al. (2004), "Schools must not only attain teaching and learning goals but must do so efficiently and in a manner that keeps faculty morale high, order in the school, and peace in the community" (p. 66). Three broad categories of a principal's impact are *school and environmental effects* (e.g., parent satisfaction, community participation, perceptions of school functioning), *intra-organizational processes* (e.g., staff morale, curricular organization, instructional effectiveness), and *student effects* (e.g. student achievement, attitudes, retention) (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, pp. 5-44). Research conducted by Bredeson (1989), Halpin and Croft (1963), and Kirby and Colbert (1992) has linked leadership behaviors to effects on school climate that have been shown to affect student achievement indirectly (Blase & Blase, 1999); the link between staff quality and organizational success is well established. In large measure, school effectiveness is intimately associated with quality of school leadership (Guthrie & Reed, 1991).

Linking leadership to school climate, teacher morale, and the performance of an organization, research shows that school success depends on instructional improvement (Blase, 1987). Studies have consistently found that successful schools are characterized by the

following: a school climate conducive to learning free of discipline problems, a school-wide emphasis on basic skills instruction, high expectations for student achievement, and a system of clear instructional objectives for monitoring and assessing student performance (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982).

Research conducted during the 1970s found that principals played an important role in school-improvement efforts and that strong administrative leadership made a difference in student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Furthermore, Firestone and Wilson (1985) argued that “research on effective schools has promoted the view that schools can be organized to improve instruction, and that principals have a key role to play” (p. 25). However, research suggests that the role of the principal is extremely complex and that the leadership effect of the principal on teachers and student learning is often oblique (Blase, 1987; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980). Organizational variables, including the size and socioeconomic status of the school, available funding, and characteristics of teachers and students need to be examined to understand how leadership behaviors of those principals are shaped (Bossert et al., 1982). These organizational variables also contribute to a school’s effectiveness. Sheppard’s (1996) review of existing studies showed a positive and strong relationship between effective instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by principals and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and innovativeness (Blase & Blase, 1999).

Meanings teachers give to specific school-related subjects are often directly linked to their views and ideas of their school leaders (Blase, 1987). Effective leadership is partly responsible for a positive culture in schools; effective school administrators are seen as *associative*, and ineffective school administrators are viewed as *disassociative* (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981). Teachers view effective principals as diplomatic problem solvers and opportunity

creators who initiate, facilitate, and monitor teacher performance (Blase, 1993). Sheppard (1996) stated that promoting a teacher's professional development was the most influential instructional leadership behavior (see also Blase & Blase, 1999). An interesting observation is that the task of creating, implementing, and evaluating professional development is often in the hands of the assistant principal.

Research on instructional practices completed by Deal and Celotti (1980) identified six operable factors that affect student learning: time-on-task; smaller class sizes; differentiated grouping within a classroom; pacing, sequencing, and coverage of content of lessons; teacher praise in evaluation; and students' perceptions of the value of instructional tasks (Bossert et al., 1982). The method of clinical supervision can be used by principals to influence these practices. However, principals are not always afforded the time necessary to accomplish this task school-wide. Hallinger and Heck (1996) conducted an extensive study of existing research from 1981 to 1995. Their ultimate findings supported the theory that student learning is influenced by principal leadership. Ron Edmond added to the literature by identifying five school-level variables that correlate strongly with student achievement (Marzano, 2001). In today's schools, principals are not, or should not be, the only school leaders. Assistant principal research, therefore, can provide new insight into school effectiveness.

Laws and Policies in Georgia Defining the Assistant Principal

The work of the assistant principal is critical for implementing federal, state, and local expectations as they translate law and policy requirements (Marshall, 1992). While facing outside influences and completing tasks necessary for the job, administrators are required by law or by policy to act in a certain manner in given situations. Many of the Georgia laws and policies pertain to general school administrators. Although specific laws do not currently exist relative to

assistant principals, there are rules that principals as well as assistant principals must follow as they perform their jobs. The following is a list of responsibilities, standards, policies, and programs that public school administrators must be aware of:

1. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
2. Early Intervention Program
3. Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
4. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
5. Promotion, Placement, and Retention
6. Quality Core Curriculum
7. Reporting Suspected Child Abuse
8. Reporting of Student Data
9. School Improvement Teams
10. Special Education Laws
11. Staff and Professional Development
12. Student Assessment
13. Student Safety
14. Teacher Evaluations

For purposes of discussion, this researcher specifically selected these examples because they demonstrate activities related to curriculum and professional development decisions, supervision and evaluation of teachers, student achievement, and knowledge of various developmental phases and learning styles.

The Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) enumerates the academic standards that must be met in all schools throughout the state of Georgia. It explains the minimum skills in every

subject area at each grade level, K-12, that every child should master prior to being promoted to the next grade. The Criteria Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) is the measure used to assess students' knowledge of the QCC. The CRCT is one of the measures used to determine whether a particular school has met Adequate Yearly Progress, AYP. There are several actions taken toward a school and the local administration if AYP is continually not met. One of these such actions is job loss or demotion.

Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia contains laws pertaining to education and school management in Georgia. School administrators must be knowledgeable of all sections relating to job expectations. Staff and Professional Development (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-232) states that "Each local school system shall develop a three-year projected comprehensive staff development plan and shall submit such plan to the State Board of Education for review and approval. . . . This plan shall be revisited and updated annually." It further states that the plan must address the needs of school personnel and must include collaboration with other organizations, such as local colleges. This plan filters to individual schools, where the staff development liaison must adhere to this policy at the local level. Often the person in charge of staff development is the assistant principal.

School improvement should be an ongoing goal of each school. In order to receive and maintain the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation, each school must develop school improvement teams that are responsible for evaluating the school programs using input from all players in the school, including students, teachers, parents, business partners, and community members. Most often, the assistant principal is the chairperson of the school improvement initiative at the local school.

Teacher evaluation is another duty often assigned to assistant principals. O.C.G.A. § 20-2-210 states,

All personnel employed by local units of administration, shall have their performance evaluated annually by appropriately trained evaluators. . . . Certified professional personnel who have deficiencies and other needs shall have professional development plans designed to mitigate such deficiencies and other needs as may have been identified during the evaluation process.

The annual evaluations conducted by the principals or assistant principals should take into consideration classroom observations, communication and interpersonal skills, attendance to assigned responsibilities, adherence to school and system rules, personal conduct, application of concepts learned throughout professional development opportunities, and academic gains of students assigned to the teachers.

The Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program (GTEP), although no longer required by the state and considered outdated by many school systems, is still the supplementary evaluation instrument used by one metro Atlanta School System. There are other mandatory components of teacher evaluation as stated in O.C.G.A. §20-2-210 (b) not satisfied by the GTEP:

1. The role of the teacher in meeting the school's student achievement goals, including the academic gains of children assigned to the teacher.
2. Observations made by the principal and assistant principals during the delivery of instruction.
3. Participation in and application of professional development opportunities.
4. Interpersonal skills related to the communication and interaction with all stakeholders of the school.
5. Taking part in all assigned responsibilities.

6. Following county and local school procedures and rules.
7. Personal conduct while performing school-related duties and activities.

These seven standards cannot be successfully met without the effective and successful leadership of school administrators. School leaders are the central agents of effective and efficient change (Eady, 2002; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). True instructional leadership, which includes clinical supervision, does not have an evaluative component.

As a result of the increased accountability placed on the public school system, student assessment is more important than ever. Section 51 of *Georgia A Plus Reform Act* (2000), requires that nationally norm-referenced instruments in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies be administered to students in grades 3, 5, and 8. In addition, criterion-referenced competency tests must be administered annually to students in grades 1-8 in reading, language arts, and mathematics, and in grades 3-8 in science and social studies. Writing assessments are to be administered to students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. The student performance data gathered from those assessments are segregated by ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic status, disability, language proficiency, grade level, subject, school, and system. The data gathered and reported are used to assign school ratings (O.C.G.A. § 20-14-33), determine school rewards (O.C.G.A. § 20-14-38), and assist with interventions for low-performing schools (O.C.G.A. § 20-14-41). These academic gains are required for evaluation of teachers as well as evaluation of the individual schools. The high stakes education environment created by this act has added pressure to both teachers and the administrators who supervise them: “Principals have experienced more change under school reform than any other group” (Bradley, 1992). Assistant principals should also be included in this resolute statement.

Amendments were added to the *Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act* (IDEA) in 1997 in order to guarantee that all children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

As educators, it is important to know the current status of the law in order to carry it out properly. With the 1997 IDEA, it must be known who is eligible, how to identify and evaluate students, what are substantive educational rights, how to implement an individualized education program (IEP), how to appropriately educate and place students, what are procedural protections, how to discipline students with disabilities, what are the transition services that are provided, the role of graduation and competency exams, and the issue of cost. (Dayton, 2002, pp. 305-345)

The IDEA had a large impact on all educators, especially administrators, who are required by law to insure the protection of students in their building by providing appropriate educational resources.

In response to all of the violent episodes in public schools during the past decade, new laws and school programs have been initiated to prevent or reduce such violence. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education prepared, for the first time, a report on school safety. This report, which provided parents, school officials, and the community a general outlook on the nature and extent of school crime along with actions schools could take, states that, “providing a safe school environment so that students can learn and mature without fear of violence or intimidation” is one of the primary goals and objectives of the *Quality Basic Education* (QBE). This goal is also restated in the *Georgia A Plus Reform Act* (2000). Administrators are taking this responsibility seriously. It is not enough to be aware; one must also be trained to plan for and handle safety-related situations. Safety and security begins with a clear and comprehensive safe school plan, which must be created by the school players under the direction of school administrators. School administrators also need to remember that school safety extends beyond school violence. The extent of school safety issues includes, but is not limited to, outside classroom supervision,

playground safety, event traffic control, natural disasters, and outside threats, such as bombs (Georgia Emergency Management Agency [GEMA], 1998).

Student safety is addressed in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-1185, which requires that all schools have a safety plan in place that includes how to respond to natural disasters, hazardous materials, transportation to and from school, and acts of terrorism, as well as school violence. It also requires that school safety plans be prepared with assistance from law enforcement, fire service, public safety, and emergency management agencies. The plans must be submitted to and receive approval from GEMA. The purpose of this action is to help curb the growing incidence of violence in schools, to respond effectively to such incidents, and to provide a safe learning environment for Georgia's children, teachers, and other school personnel. The new law mandates GEMA to provide training and technical assistance to public school systems throughout the state.

Courts have recognized that school administrators have to be given authority in order to maintain an appropriate learning environment. Teachers and administrators have certain *in loco parentis* (in the place of the parent) authority when disciplining children in school. However, school administrators must be careful to keep a safe and orderly school environment while maintaining students' individual rights. Although courts usually uphold reasonable decisions made by school officials, they do not when punishment is ruled arbitrary or discriminatory (Dunklee & Shoop, 2002). Whenever administrators must make choices as to how to carry out their responsibilities in a given situation, they are performing a discretionary function. Many duties of an assistant principal or principal involve discretionary functions. Under the Georgia Constitution, an administrator may not be second-guessed for making the wrong choice even if it results in injuries to students (LaMorte, 1999). An educator can be liable, however, if an injury to a student results from a teacher or administrator's willful negligence. The question to be asked

is whether the person accused of negligence was acting as a reasonable and prudent person would have acted in a similar situation under similar circumstances. Four elements need be present in order for there to be a valid cause of action for negligence:

1. A failure of duty to conform to a standard of conduct for the protection of others,
2. A failure to exercise an appropriate standard of care,
3. A cause in fact often referred to as “proximate cause” between the conduct and the resultant injury, and
4. Actual loss or damage as a result of the injury.

“School boards must exercise their responsibilities in an increasingly complex legal environment. Resources spent defending lawsuits against public schools are resources not available for the education of children.” (National School Board Association). As Dunklee phrased it,

Most plaintiffs sue the Board of Education directly when a school is believed to be negligent in the handling of liability cases. Also, since the Principal “signs off” on anything an assistant principal does, [the] plaintiff usually goes after the principal and the Board of Education. The same laws that the Board of Education, Superintendent, and Principals have to abide by, apply to assistant principals. Therefore any laws, state or federal, apply equally to all and you won't find much of anything directly naming the laws that specifically affect assistant principals. The same is true, for the most part, regarding policies, procedures and rules that a school district might have. The rules cover all administrators, not specifically assistant principals. (D. R. Dunklee, personal communication, September 3, 2003)

The last topic of discussion related to assistant principals' responsibilities is the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), signed into law on January 8, 2002. Designed to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students, this law has increased the accountability for states, school districts, and local schools to ensure significant changes in the way schools educate children.

The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 was a springboard for the NCLB. The NCLB is a constructive effort to focus nation-wide attention on improving student achievement, especially for various categories of lower achieving students whose historically inadequate progress has been overlooked (Elmore, 2003). The NCLB addresses a large number of issues and topics and was designed to achieve many academic goals and objectives. School administrators are just one group of people responsible for its compliance. One of the many important items listed in the NCLB is contained in Title II, Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals. In most schools, the administrators must ensure the school is staffed with high-quality teachers. Part A, Section 2101, Purpose, states the following:

The purpose is to provide grants to state educational agencies, local educational agencies, state agencies for higher education, and eligible partnerships in order to: (1) Increase student academic achievement through strategies such as improving teacher and principal quality and increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in the classroom and highly-qualified principals and assistant principals in schools and; (2) Hold local educational agencies and schools accountable for improvements in students' academic achievement.

Interesting to note, in this same section, under "definitions," the term *principal* refers also to the assistant principal.

There is much controversy over the term *highly-qualified teachers*. NCLB requires local school districts to ensure that all teachers hired to teach core academic subjects are highly qualified. In general a highly qualified teacher is fully certified, holds a bachelor's degree, and has demonstrated competency in subject knowledge and teaching (core subjects include English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography). The act also calls for all teachers of the core academic subjects (teaching in Title I programs or elsewhere) to be highly qualified by the end of school year 2005-06.

Many states claim they have encountered several problems with the NCLB (Resnick, 2003). First, they do not have a data system to track teacher qualifications for the subject areas they teach, which makes it difficult to ensure all teachers are teaching in-field. Another problem is that teacher salaries are low. Many qualified applicants continue to choose other careers that offer higher salaries, which has led to the current teacher shortage that continues to plague our public school system. For those who do enter the teaching profession, there are currently few programs in place, at the district level, that provide support. With additional funding cuts, the programs that do exist run the risk of being reduced. A fourth problem is the lack of principal leadership. With the increased demands on principals, they are unable to offer the support new teachers report needing in their new positions.

In part F, Section 2601, of the NCLB, professional development for principals as leaders of school reform is explained. Use of grant funds can provide professional development to principals and other school administrators, helping them become effective school leaders and prepare all students to meet challenging state content and student performance standards. Topics of professional development include the following:

1. Comprehensive school reform
2. Effective instructional practice
3. Leadership skill
4. Parental and community involvement
5. Recruitment, assignment, retention, and evaluation of teachers and other instructional staff
6. State content standards
7. Using smaller classes effectively

The laws and policies surrounding the position of school administrator may be acting as a hindrance to the main objectives they were created to support, mainly the academic achievement of students.

Instructional Leadership

Research on instructional leadership is abundant. A simple search completed from one of the premier databases displays more than 100 matches. Among these myriad studies exist different theories regarding instructional leadership. Some theories have been tested and proven to have direct influence on academic achievement. Others have shown benefits to teachers that have indirectly benefited classroom instruction. Most scholars would be quick to state the importance of principal leadership; however, details are deficient concerning how principals respond to their schools' environmental contexts as they shape the organization's means and student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) and how the leadership is shared with other school personnel, namely the assistant principal (Worner & Stokes, 1987).

The conceptualization of leadership has evolved considerably over the past 25 years, changing the principal's role from manager, to street-level bureaucrat, to change agent, to instructional manager, to instructional leader, to transformational leader (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Practicing administrators and researchers have different ideas about what makes a true instructional leader, depending on their training and experiences and on the context in which they are working. Although studies most often focus on the principal as the primary leader (Barth, 1990; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980), what instructional leadership looks like may differ from community to community due to the expansion of roles of all educational leaders during the past decade. These roles include a larger concentration on teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and accountability (King, 2002).

It is difficult to articulate a universal definition of *instructional leadership*. Generally, instructional leadership refers to the direction, resources, and support provided by principals to the staff members and students to improve teaching and learning (Baron & Uhl, 1995). According to Glickman (1985), five primary duties of instructional leadership are (a) direct assistance to teachers, (b) group development, (c) staff development, (d) curriculum development, and (e) action research. Instructional leadership emphasizes collegial classroom observations and focuses on support, guidance, and encouragement of reflective teaching and is often considered a combination of supervision of classroom instruction, staff development, and curriculum development (Smith & Andrews, 1989).

Writers generally agree on an explanation of leadership that describes it as the process by which the actions of people within a social organization are guided toward the realization of specific goals (Krug, 1992). Fundamental issues are raised by this explanation:

1. Is there a common behavior identified in leaders that transcends specific contexts?
2. Can the value of leadership be measured?
3. Are there universal characteristics that typify leaders, and if so, what are they?

Although it is difficult to define exact activities and actions, there are certain behaviors that indicate a stronger level of leadership and are an important predictor of academic success: the manner in which school principals govern the school, build a strong climate, and organize and monitor the school's instructional program (Blase & Blase, 2003; Cawelti, 1987). Blase (1987) found that effective leadership is linked to the design of social and cultural structures in schools. Blase also identified a pattern of leadership competencies and personal qualities essential to effective educational leadership: honesty, compassion, communication, and problem solving.

Effective methods of instructional leadership combine collaboration, coaching, inquiry, collegial study groups, reflective discussion, and action research (Blase & Blase, 1999).

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) was formed in the early 1990s to create model standards and assessment for school leaders (Murphy & Forsyth, 1999). In 1996, ISLLC released a comprehensive list of standards for effective education leaders with the purpose of promoting performance-based standards emphasizing the impact of administrators on the educational success of all students. Thirty-five of the 50 states using these ISLLC standards are at different stages of implementation (Perkins-Gough, 2002).

Thomas Sergiovanni (1987) proposed one of the first models of instructional leadership. He identified five leadership forces: technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural (McEwan, 1998). Three of those listed are specific to the schooling system. First, one must have a strong educational force, which includes being knowledgeable about learning theories, effective instruction, and curriculum. Also, one must be a symbolic force, which includes being a representative and communicator of values that are important to the school. Finally, one must be a cultural leader. The instructional leader should be skilled at constructing a culture in which everyone works together to accomplish the task of education. There are several roles that are basic to successful functioning as an instructional leader (Keefe & Jenkins, 1991). These roles include strategic planner, monitor, role model, resources obtainer, communicator, cheerleader, climate builder, and decision-maker. Effective instructional leaders use a broad-based approach, integrating reflection and growth to build an educational culture of individual and group critical examination for instructional improvement (Blase & Blase, 1999).

Currently changing organizations have generated an idea of transformational leadership, which calls not only for a change in the purposes and resources of those involved in the leader-

follower relationship, but an elevation of both, a change for the better (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). Transactional leadership style has both followers and leaders working to achieve individual and separate goals, whereas transformational leadership style has followers and leaders acting with reciprocal purposes (Blase, 1993). Transformational leadership elevates individual's views from self-interest to a joint effort directed at common goals. Starratt (1995) defined transformational leadership as leadership that is concerned with moral values: transforming leadership shifts the concentration from self-centeredness to altruistic beliefs, attitudes, and values. Leithwood (1994) reported a case for the transformational school leadership approach due to the detrimental challenges facing schools. His case for transformational leadership is based on the following ideas:

1. The means and ends for school restructuring are uncertain. The purposes for restructuring, such as schools prepared for the 21st century, and initiatives required for those purposes are not clear. Commitment, rather than control, is at the forefront.
2. School restructuring requires both first-order and second-order changes. Reform strategies must include changes in core technology and must be institutionalized following initial implementation. Second-order changes must include shared vision and distribution of leadership.
3. School restructuring is aimed at secondary schools as well as elementary schools. Empowering colleagues encourages administrators to focus energies on abilities.
4. The professionalization of teaching is a centerpiece of the school restructuring agenda. Instructional leadership demands an active role in classroom practice based on high levels of pedagogical expertise.

This leadership style fosters professional learning conditions through six dimensions: (a) articulation and sharing of vision, (b) fostering group goals, (c) individual support to subordinates, (d) intellectual stimulation, (e) appropriate behavior modeling, and (f) high performance expectations (Leithwood, 1990). Fundamentally, the transformational leadership approach aims to foster capacity development and a higher level of personal commitment to organizational goals on the part of the leader's colleagues. An ongoing question deals with designs in current leadership effects research and their influence on the school organization and student outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

Some view transformational and transactional leadership as opposite ends of the same spectrum (Leithwood, Tomlinson, & Genge, 1996), the former focusing primarily on leadership and the latter focusing on management. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) included four management dimensions in his transactional leadership model: staffing, instructional support, monitoring school activities, and community focus. They viewed these dimensions as fundamental to organizational stability. Bennis and Nanus (1985) referred to Burns's transformational leadership as normative-instrumental leadership: leadership focusing on control in which the decisional authority and responsibility of others are limited (Blase, 1993).

In their study of principals, Blase, Blase, Anderson, and Dungan (1995) found that the principals used both power-over and power-with approaches. Principals used collegial and reciprocal means. A recurring issue in education that often inhibits the power-with relationship is supervision, or evaluative leadership. Many scholars have viewed supervision and evaluation as extremely different due to their different purposes (Glatthorn, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1987; Zepeda & Ponticelli, 1998). Both are intended to improve instruction, which will ultimately affect

student achievement. However, evaluation is viewed negatively because of current practice and the simple history of routine.

One dilemma in schools is the distinction between leadership and management. Leadership is essentially building and maintaining a sense of vision, culture, and interpersonal relationships, whereas management is coordinating, supporting, and monitoring organizational activities (Day, 2000). With the increased accountability and pressure being applied to our nations' schools, every degree of the school must be examined, most importantly, the existing leadership within the public school system. Often the leadership afforded is dictated by outside influences. The school leader is constrained by external policies such as local board policy, state laws, and federal laws (Firestone & Wilson, 1985). School leaders must then find a way to implement all mandated programs and policies while providing support to teachers in the form of supervision. Leadership and management might conflict with one another and can be viewed as being in opposition. Indeed, evidence consistently supports the idea that the assistant principal acts as a manager who performs custodial and clerical duties delegated by the principal (Glanz, 1994; Gorton, 1987; Marshall, 1985). According to Hartzell et al. (1995), "The nature of the assistant principalship and the skills required to be successful as an assistant principal are directed much more toward management than toward leadership, a condition that does not promote the development of visionary leadership in its occupants" (p. 158).

Any one faculty member within an educational center can be an instructional leader, but principals are most often seen as the primary instructional leaders because of their roles and because they frequently set the tone for the organization. This same tone determines the level of success a school experiences as an educational institution. Additionally, it can determine the leadership capacity of the assistant principalship. The principal is the one who sets the tasks,

standards, and expectations that lead to the assistant principal being viewed as a leader or a simple administrative lackey (Fulton, 1987; Gorton, 1987).

As it becomes more apparent that other school professionals should be promoted as leaders, many universities where school administrators are being trained are beginning to emphasize the importance of sharing leadership with all players in the educational system. However, the outcome-based culture standard and the outcome-based collaboration standard are less emphasized in preparation programs than they should be (Gonzalez et al., 2002).

Instructional leadership can be shared with teachers through coaching, reflection, collegial investigation, study teams, explorations, and problem solving in some schools (Glanz & Neville, 1997). The focus then is on an entire community of learners. Instructional leadership behaviors of empowering principals are providing staff development, modeling inquiry, questioning, encouraging risk taking, requiring justification of practices, and wandering around the school building with a purpose (Blase & Blase, 1999). Athletic teams have long known the importance of collaboration in order to be successful. Vince Lombardi once said, "The achievement of an organization is the results of the combined effort of each individual" (Lombardi, 2000). That same team spirit is beneficial to a school as well. Administrators should employ all members of their teaching staff as instructional leaders (Sergiovanni, 1999). This collaboration is imperative if schools are to improve academic achievement.

For many years, instructional supervision was seen as a way to inspect and control teachers (Gordon, 1992). However, an obvious conflict exists between evaluation and supervision (Acheson & Gall, 1997). Current evaluator practices include a principal or assistant principal using a form to report teachers' performance. In most schools, it is the principal or

assistant principal, the instructional supervisors, who carry out this role. Clinical supervision and true leadership must mean more than a one-stop evaluation.

The abundance of instructional leadership research overwhelmingly identifies principals as important to the successful functioning of schools. Although many theories and strategies about the importance of instructional leadership exist, rarely was anyone but the principal identified as the instructional leader, until recently. Past research has suggested that because of the very nature of the position, the assistant principalship does not provide a way to enhance leadership skills. According to Mertz (2000),

assistant principals were being taught to coordinate and control, to manage the school, and in doing so, to maintain the existing structure. If this is the leadership frame assistant principals live, they may be hard pressed to think of, no less create, frames they have not lived or to harbor a wish to do so. (p. 10)

However, emerging data adds to the argument that assistant principals and other school personnel as instructional leaders are imperative to the effective functioning of schools (Dennard, 1993; Sabatini, 2003; Venditti, 2002).

Development of the Role of Assistant Principal

The general public and local, state, and federal policymakers have a misconception of the principal as a school leader whose heroism will save the day (Kennedy, 2002). Today's principal must be an instructional leader, visionary, politician, manager, strategist, community leader, and emotional leader, but there are few principals ready to carry out all of these roles successfully. Can one person take on all of these roles and perform well?

There is a popular opinion within the realm of education that, historically, the majority of assistant principals have sought their position as a necessary step to the job of principal (Austin & Brown, 1970; Gorton & Kattman, 1985; Koru, 1993). According to Marshall (1992), this career socialization process begins with the assistant principalship and often continues into the

principalship or, in some instances, the superintendency. The assumption behind this opinion is that the experiences and training provided by the assistant principalship offer true instructional leadership training. However, it is believed that this view is changing. Qualified professionals are not seeking the position of school principal, and many school districts report a shortage in the labor pool for the K-12 principal position (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2004).

There is lack of research focusing on the work and role of the assistant principal as an instructional and curriculum leader at the elementary school level. On their website, the NAESP, an organization developed specifically to address topics at the elementary school level, identifies 45 categories of topics in existence, none on the assistant principal position. Ironically, a review of textbooks on the topic of school administration and principal leadership reveals that mention of assistant principals is limited (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003; Haller & Strike, 1986; Kaiser, 2003; Kimbrough & Nunnery, 1988; Kowalski, 2003; Marion, 2002; Matthews & Crow, 2003; McCreight, 2004; Milstein, 1993; Murphy & Forsyth, 1999; Reinhurtz & Beach, 2004). Razik and Swanson (2001) shared insight into the new millennium placing larger demands upon educational leaders, namely the principal. Transformational leadership and affective schools research highlight the principal as the one appointed to lead. But the increase in accountability has led to an increase in job demands, with a decrease in perceived authority, which has left the principal feeling a lack of efficacy (Sergiovanni et al., 2004). According to Glatthorn (2000), “There will be a need for strong leadership, which is typically provided by the principals. In some schools, however, the assistant principal or another individual assumes major responsibility for curriculum leadership” (p. 66).

Even though added burdens have been placed on principals and a call exists for empowering educators to accept leadership roles, assistant principals have received little mention in a review of the professional literature. In a review of research done in 1984 by W. D. Greenfield, 294 citations were identified addressing the role of assistant principal (Greenfield et al., 1986). Among those, only 12 appeared to contribute useful knowledge regarding the role, career, and work of assistant principals. More recently, in a review of 756 articles published between 1993 and 1999, only 8 articles, or approximately 1 percent, focused on the role of the assistant principal (Kaplan & Owings, 1999).

Although it is difficult to identify exactly when the initial assistant principal position emerged, it is believed that “submasters” created in Boston in the year 1849 had the first characteristics of what we now view as the assistant principal position (NAESP, 1970). Eighteen years later, in this same city, Superintendent John Philbrick made the statement that these submasters should be capable of handling the school master’s work when he is absent. Found mostly in the middle and secondary schools, the role was initially developed to relieve some duties from the principals. During the 20th century, the escalating numbers and sizes of schools led to more assistants to the principals to meet the demands of growing and expanding complex systems (NAESP, 1970). In large schools, during the 1920s, principals chose a supervisor, from the pool of experienced teachers within the school, to help new teachers in subject matter mastery (Matthews & Crow, 2003). This person was traditionally female and had little authority and no evaluation duties. A second role emerging at this time was known as a general supervisor, skilled in logistical operations and usually filled by a male, who became the primary assistant to the principal (Glanz, 1994).

By the 1940s and 1950s, the person acting as an assistant to the principal had become known as the *assistant to the principal* (Matthews & Crow, 2003). It was believed that with a lighter workload, the principal would have more time for instructional leadership. The assistant position evolved in an unplanned manner focusing on short-term organizational needs, such as additional building-level operations managers and entry-level administration positions (Hess, 1985). Although assistant principals engaged in some instructional duties, most of their time was spent in school management (Glanz, 1994).

The role of the assistant principal continues to evolve, but conflict arises when the quality and quantity of demands placed on a person are unreasonable. Katz and Kahn (1978) defined role conflict as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult (Bacharach & Bamberger, 1990). Role conflict takes place when the occupant of a position encounters inconsistent demands and expectations (Grusky, 1980). Rizzo (1970) defined role conflict in terms of the compatibility of demands on the individual; the incompatibility may be due to conflicts between organizational demands and one's own values, problems of personal resource allocation, or obligations to several different people (Bacharach & Bamberger, 1990).

It is impossible to take on any leadership role without encountering conflict. The more successful a leader, the more one experiences conflict. Many theorists believe that conflict is not only unavoidable but also desirable in effective organizations. Daresh (2001) found in his study that educational leaders typically face conflict from within the organization, outside the organization, and within one's self. Daresh listed several types of conflict that exist in leadership positions. The first, Interrole Conflict, is the disagreement between two or more roles simultaneously fulfilled by one person. Often the assistant principal must wear many "hats" and

be many different things to a variety of people. The roles may clash with one another causing a conflict of interest. Intrareference group conflict is a disagreement within a reference group in expectations for the role of supervision. This conflict will arise when no clear, common vision of the role of assistant principal exists. Interreference group conflict is a disagreement between two or more different reference groups in their expectations for the role of supervision—viewed as an “instruction specialist” by one group and as a “snoopervisor” by another.

Role ambiguity refers to the situation that takes place when the occupant of a position lacks the appropriate role-related information. This ambiguity occurs when the position is not clearly defined or when access to needed information is impeded (i.e., occupant’s inexperience or newness of position in an organization). Ambiguity refers to the degree of felt uncertainty regarding one’s duties, authority, allocation of time, and goals. According to Marshall (1992), “Role ambiguity with regards to assistant principals is why their roles and duties include many gray areas—ill-defined, inconsistent, and at times incoherent responsibilities, roles, and resources” (p. 6).

Assistant principals continue to have increased responsibility but decreased control over decisions (Marshall, 1992). Some assistant principals may experience lack of job satisfaction, emotional problems, a sense of futility, ineffectiveness, and lack of confidence caused by role ambiguity, particularly when the information provided about the job and the actual daily job requirements seem very different (Austin & Brown, 1970; Fulton, 1987; Kelly 1987; Marshall, 1992).

Alienation also contributes to the ambiguity felt. An individual’s level of alienation is increased or decreased by the individual’s environment within the organization (Calabrese & Adams, 1987). Having to support teachers as well as the principal can be difficult for an assistant

principal, when their opinions and practices are often incongruent. There is a period of time that new assistant principals must go through that includes their separation from teachers as a reference group and their initial association with administrators instead (Marshall, 1985). Relationships with teachers are permanently altered. There is a social distancing that occurs when a teacher first becomes an assistant principal (Hartzell et al., 1995). According to Marshall (1992), “When they must monitor teachers’ compliance, assistants have difficulty maintaining equal collegial and professional relationships with them” (p. 7).

All assistant principals work with a certain degree of role ambiguity (Marshall, 1992). Because some specific roles of assistant principals are ambiguous, some important functions may not be given the attention needed. The assistant principal is a link among and between teachers, students, parents, and the principal, with emphasis on interpretation of district goals and values through support for instructional practice, curriculum development, and learning activities (Cantwell, 1993). District, professional, association, and other related forces can create constraints or help assistant principals complete their job (Marshall, 1993). The assistant principal who has little sense of how to take on an area of responsibility assertively may never feel secure enough to do any long-range planning or develop innovative approaches to solving school problems (Marshall, 1992).

The role of the principal as the solitary instructional leader is no longer justified (Marsh, 2000). According to Sergiovanni et al. (2004), “In the collaborative world of the twenty-first century school, the principal is no longer, if he or she ever was, the organizational expert” (p. 193). Gardner (2000) goes further to state,

Our high level leaders will be more effective in every way if the systems over which they preside are made vital by dispersed leadership. . . . No individual has all the skills—and certainly not the time—to carry out all the complex tasks of contemporary leadership. (pp. 11-12)

The Assistant Principalship

The position of assistant principal is often a misunderstood key to the total school program. Frequently, the assistant principal is viewed as both the bridge between the classroom teacher and the principal and the bridge necessary to obtain the principalship. This perception does not accurately describe today's assistant principal. There have been few studies completed that accurately capture exactly what this position entails, what motivates a person to fill it, what duties and roles are required, and the importance of this individual in the school picture. Because "surveys of tasks and assessment of job satisfaction do not adequately capture the essence of the assistant principalship" (Marshall, 1992), it is necessary not only to talk with but also to observe the individual in his/her environment to achieve a deeper insight into the role. Past research has been insufficient in this area.

Over the past two decades, Catherine Marshall has done extensive research in the area of the secondary assistant principalship. She has theorized about a custodial orientation, which develops during the assistant principalship and continues into the principalship, that inhibits innovativeness (Marshall & Greenfield, 1987). The future principals are often socialized in this manner and may not recover (Calabrese & Adams, 1987). Marshall (1993) argued that this role ambiguity exists because new tasks and new technologies have challenged established responsibilities. Marshall also found that assistant principals, whose job description seems to be to "do everything the principal cannot and does not want to face," tend to feel tremendous dissatisfaction with the position (p. 16). Normative studies have been completed on assistant principals that include surveys of tasks, duties, status, selection, and career aspirations, but do little to provide an adequate account of the intricacies of the person in the position (Marshall, 1992). In order to achieve a more accurate understanding, the complex school organization must

be examined. In addition, most studies cover the secondary level rather than the elementary level.

Prior to 1969, very little was known about the work of the “vice-principal.” In 1970, two similar reports were published, *The Report of the Assistant Principalship* and *The Assistant Principalship in Public Elementary Schools*. Although both studies were about the “forgotten man,” the former focused on the secondary school, while the other focused on the elementary school. Austin and Brown issued *The Report of the Assistant Principalship* (1970), which shed new light on the misunderstood position. The first nationwide research study of the assistant principalship, published by the National Association of Secondary Principals, surveyed more than 1,000 high school assistant principals about 59 administrative tasks. The project, consisting of a normative study, career study, and shadow study, presented several important findings:

1. Assistant principals were involved in everything at the school.
2. Principals and assistant principals’ viewpoints varied regarding aspects of duties.
3. Ideas about the 59 task areas varied across schools.
4. Assistant principals were rarely given complete responsibility for duties in the 59 task areas.
5. Work with community relations and student activities was seen as less important than other tasks.
6. Principals thought that most assistant principal assignments did not allow for high-level elective behavior.
7. Principals held more positive perceptions of the role than the assistant principals.
8. Job descriptions were non-existent.

9. The assistant principals' work did not vary systematically with the school site or formal school structure.
10. The majority of assistant principals did not stay in the job of assistant principal for a long period of time (Austin & Brown, 1970; Greenfield, 1985a).

Although the report was the first of its kind and was a landmark in the literature, follow-up to the subject was virtually non-existent until the 1980's. Studies on the assistant principal role matched much of the early research on principals and contributed a miniscule amount to the knowledge base informing the practices of educational administration. Reform proposals for changing the education system added responsibilities for assistant principals but decreased their decision-making control over what is important in the functioning of schools and reaching school-related goals (Marshall, 1992).

The second study, *The Assistant Principalship in Public Elementary Schools* (NAESP, 1970), focused on the elementary school assistant principal. Only one method, surveys, was utilized to obtain the data for this study. A four-page questionnaire consisting of 47 questions was mailed to 1,492 assistant principals in a random sampling. Results from the tabulations of the respondents' surveys included the following:

1. Only 35% became an assistant to prepare themselves for the principalship compared to 33% who were urged to do so by a superior.
2. The assistant principalship was the ultimate goal for 20% of the respondents.
3. Roles and responsibilities were given to only 19% of them by the school system. Only 28% indicated that their job responsibilities varied.
4. Respondents stated that the major responsibility they had was pupil personnel (64%). Supervision was mentioned as a major responsibility by 24% of the respondents.

5. In contrast, when asked, “Which area of activity would you increase so as to make your work more effective and satisfying?” supervision was the overwhelming affirmative response of 65% of the participants.
6. With regard to clerical work, 56% said that they spent between 1 and 19 hours a week on those tasks, and 17% indicated 20 hours or more.
7. A large number (65%), when asked what preparation or experiences had contributed most to their success as an assistant principal, discussed their experience on the job with a competent principal.

Although the study was limited in data gathering, the surveys did reveal some important perceptions. The assistant principalship is a major training ground for future elementary school principals, and the opportunities for effective developmental experiences made available to assistant principals need to be improved. Assistant principals are essential to the functioning of schools. They wear many hats, including protector, policy maker, encourager, judge, jury, and confidante, and “maintaining organizational stability is at the center of their daily activity” (Marshall, 1992, p. 5). The study also found that assistant principals should play an important role in instructional improvement and management (Greenfield, 1985b).

Roles vary among schools and districts, but commonalities do exist. Kriekard and Norton (1980) attempted to identify roles key to the position. They found school management, staff personnel, community relations, student activities, curriculum and instruction, and pupil personnel items to be universal roles. They then divided those into measurable entities. Out of six tasks, 21 competencies, and 102 indicators of those competencies and tasks, only 1 task, 3 competencies, and 13 indicators dealt directly with instruction. This imbalance clearly indicates that the assistant principal is an “assistant” rather than a leader in education. Although the

utilization of assistant principals should be broad enough to serve the needs of a given school community (Potter, 1980), they should also be seen as educational leaders if the school systems are to continue to be successful.

Black (1980) completed a study in Baltimore, Maryland aimed at identifying how secondary assistant principals and their superiors viewed the assistant principalship. The survey respondents included superintendents, principals, assistant principals, and teachers. Her study identified similarities and differences in perceptions of the roles of assistant principals. Her research resulted in the creation of a position guide that clarified the assistant principal role by listing functions, responsibilities, and key duties. The study also highlighted time as a major problem with the job. Even though more time should be spent on curriculum development and instructional supervision, most assistant principals and principals report that clerical and organizational duties consume most of their time (Cantwell, 1993). Black (1980) stated, “The assistant principalship, originally established to handle clerical duties, has evolved in a haphazard manner, with ambiguous job descriptions, and a lack of role clarity” (p. 33).

A field study completed in California by Reed and Conners (1982) gathered data from eight secondary assistant principals. This study, which explored assistant principals’ work within the school organization, measured how critical the position was to stabilizing and transforming the school organization. The data indicated, however, that the task of supervision dominated the large majority of the school day and attention of the assistant principal.

Gorton and Kattman’s (1985) study of elementary assistant principals gathered data through a survey completed nationally by 400 assistant principals. These assistant principals were on average 46 years of age, were educated at the masters level or above, had served five years or more as an assistant principal, and had more than 13 years of teaching experience. The

main reasons they had become assistant principals were the opportunities to help others, to use their aptitudes, to work with others, to exercise leadership, and to be creative. The researchers found that assistant principals wanted, and had the ability, to take on more instructional responsibilities even though their main duties were administering student discipline, supervising substitute teachers, providing materials, and creating teacher duties. In addition, a low turnover in the principalship was evident, and a need existed to reinvent the assistant principal's role to focus on curriculum and instruction. However, with too many daily duties and not enough time, assistant principals found it difficult to deliver the instructional support needed.

In a questionnaire completed by assistant principals, principals, and superintendents in Washington State, participants responded to various questions regarding secondary assistant principals' duties and responsibilities. Responses were gathered from a 37-question survey regarding the degree to which assistant principals were involved in identified duties and the degree to which they should be directly involved in them. Smith (1987) discovered an overwhelming opinion that assistant principals should be involved in aspects of school administration, curriculum and instruction, personnel, student activities, professional development, and general management, the largest involvement being in the area of improving instruction. The data collected also provided a profile of the assistant principal as a white male between the ages of 30 and 46 with a masters degree in educational administration and 2-14 years experience in their current position.

Seven years following their initial research, Norton and Kriekard (1987) set out to identify the optimal competencies of assistant principals. They surveyed 263 high school assistant principals. Their study found that examining competencies would assist the system in several ways. First, existing job descriptions could be reviewed and adjusted accordingly.

Secondly, training and professional development could be supported. In addition, the selection process and evaluation measures could be enhanced. Lastly, identifying competencies would assist in defining the job nationally. In general, those involved could understand competency levels needed for the position of assistant principal.

The same year, Worner and Stokes (1987) surveyed 200 high school principals and determined that they were responsible for all of the instructional leadership activities. Of the 38 instructional leadership activities identified by the administration, only one was given primarily to the assistant principalship (p. 52). Their study suggested that more research should be completed on other leaders in the building who plan, organize, and direct instructional activities. The assistant principal is one of those leaders.

Cantwell (1993) conducted a study of assistant principals in 1988. Seventy-two assistant principals and 36 of their principals completed questionnaires anonymously about their perceptions of assistant principal job time spent on seven particular administrative functions. The administrators were from different inner-city elementary and junior high schools. His research found that assistant principals, as well as principals, saw the importance of assistant principals spending more time on curriculum and instruction. This finding was not in line with what assistant principals had been expected to do by their superiors: spend additional time with clerical and organizational duties. Without official and explicit roles and duties, assistant principals can become confused about what exactly is expected. This confusion draws attention to an important matter. There was an obvious absence of clear communication between the principals and the assistant principals. This lack of communication often hinders the team leadership role of the assistant principals (Paskey, 1989). Another obstacle highlighted in Cantwell's study was daily time constraints.

Josey (1988) studied the perception of principals and assistant principals in Georgia. He sought to determine whether curriculum development and instruction by assistant principals should hold the highest responsibility. The quantitative study found that, based on participant response, there were four roles that helped clarify the difference between actual practice and ideal practice. The first was evaluating curriculum for improvement of instruction. Supervising the instructional budget was the second role. The third role was classroom assignments. Finally, the duty for which assistant principals should have primary responsibility, according to this study, was evaluating those individuals applying for faculty and staff positions. The study shed light on the differences in what administrators thought should be the most important aspects of the job and what was the actual practice of the job.

A study of assistant principals in the Houston, Texas metro area found the work of the assistant principal to be characterized by brevity, centering on clerical tasks, discipline, caretaking, and other non-instructional duties. Koru (1993) found that the role of the assistant principal does not provide adequate training for the principalship, even though most of the assistant principals she talked with ultimately desired the principal position and only viewed the assistant principal position as a transitional one.

Another study, also at the secondary level, utilized a questionnaire to gather data from a national sample of 1,000 principals and assistant principals. Dennard (1993) investigated the duties, leadership styles, and ambiguity of the instructional assistant principal role from the view points of both the assistant principals and their principals. In her research, she found that self-perception of the assistant principal was incongruent with how the principal perceived the assistant principal. Furthermore, principals and assistant principals did not agree on assistant principal responsibilities. It has been suggested, in other instances, that the range of the assistant

principals' duties may be influenced by the values of the principals. Principals can influence the relevance of the assistant principalship by their actions and behavior (Austin & Brown, 1970; Panyako & Rorie, 1987). The principal often defines the position by setting the standards and expectations of the position.

Marcoulides and Heck (1993) shed light on the possibility that some assistant principals' work can be considered leadership activities. Using the School Leadership Skills Inventory instrument, the frequency of 20 administrative task dimensions seen as relevant to academic performance were measured. Through analyzing tasks with the use of surveys, the researchers determined that the work of the assistant principal may actually involve the application of leadership skills.

Glanz (1994) conducted a survey of 200 New York City assistant principals with an 82 percent response rate achieved from a random sampling of assistant principals from elementary and middle schools. Data were collected using a questionnaire consisting of 13 open-ended questions. Glanz found that current duties performed by assistant principals were historically linked to practices of the past rather than effective instructional leadership strategies for improving student achievement. He concluded that the assistant principalship had not changed much since its inception and that the assistant principalship did not offer adequate training for becoming a principal due to the position's current duties and responsibilities.

Various functions that the assistant principal executes seem to define his/her role within the school. Hartzell et al. (1995) found that the assistant principal is often viewed as the disciplinarian, attendance coordinator, and master schedule creator of the school. This view of the assistant principal may be created by the principal. The job of the assistant principal, which

often maintains organization stability, tends to be reactive rather than proactive because of the roles assigned by the principal.

Bush (1997) completed a dissertation at Wayne State University that sought to determine the perceived level of involvement of assistant principals as instructional leaders in public elementary schools. The study incorporated a demographic survey and questionnaire to collect data. This study, completed in Detroit, found that elementary school assistant principals performed instructional leadership tasks according to Detroit Public Schools' assistant principals' job description to a certain degree, but the duties performed most frequently were related to discipline, allocation of materials, student evaluation, and development of curricular programs. Additionally, Bush found that younger and less experienced assistant principals participated in instructional leadership tasks and coordinated instructional progress more often than other assistant principals who had been in their position much longer.

Frazier (2002) found, in his doctoral work completed at the University of Southern Mississippi, that no roles or responsibilities existed that the assistant principals did not perform. The tasks reported by assistant principals most often were administrative, management, and student related. The study involved middle school, junior high school, and high school assistant principals in Mississippi. Survey results indicated that the majority of the 139 participants were using the assistant principal position to train for future advancement.

St. Louis secondary public school principals were asked to complete a survey regarding the actual and ideal competencies of assistant principals. The competencies were divided into six areas: management of school, leadership in staff personnel, community relations, instructional leadership, student activities, and pupil personnel. The purpose of the study was to determine whether the assistant principalship prepares one to be an effective principal. Batenhurst (2002)

found, based on his data analysis, that the roles performed by assistant principals and principals are different and that, although the former position assists in preparation for the principalship, it does not provide adequate skills acquisition.

Venditti's (2002) qualitative work examined leadership in the role of the assistant principal through a cognitive approach and found that a school's assistant principal is important to the school in which he or she serves. Her research suggests that the assistant principal position needs to be reconceptualized as something more than a transition to the principalship. Administrators who possess problem-solving abilities necessary for the outstanding demands of the position should be sought. She attempted to determine the internal variables supporting leadership and understanding how the leadership of the assistant principal is exercised.

A study in Southern California examined job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of public school elementary assistant principals (Cornell, 2003). Cornell found that a higher level of job satisfaction resulted from intrinsic factors and a higher level of job dissatisfaction from extrinsic factors. The intrinsic items included the work itself and achievement. The extrinsic items included working conditions, district/site policy, and interpersonal relations with superiors. The overwhelming workload, lack of resources, and perceived exclusion from district communication plans interfered with the assistant principals' ability to do their job. The majority of participants viewed the job as training ground for the principalship. With the increase in population and diversity throughout the state of California in the past decade and a recent teacher shortage, there has been added pressure on school administrators.

Research projects concerning assistant principals are primarily quantitative studies focused on the non-instructional tasks that secondary assistant principals are expected to complete on a daily basis. These studies have also identified a dissatisfaction with what assistant

principals see as obstacles of the position. The role of the assistant principal is often recognized as the transitional entry to school-level and district-level administration. Where educators learn about and are accepted into the administrative culture, the assistant principalship is assumed to provide experiences enhancing the development of leadership that will aid in future school leadership posts. However, as noted, there are multiple problems, including conflicting role expectations, with this assumption.

Summary

The limited amount of research on the assistant principal as instructional leader of the elementary school is extremely problematic. All players within the school are extremely important in the “game of education.” But, often undervalued, the assistant principalship is often seen as a necessary means to get the experience for the principalship, even though the available on-the-job training is not effective. Another dilemma is that not every individual desires to become a principal.

It is not enough to identify and hire an individual to be the assistant to the principal. This person must be knowledgeable of all local, state, and federal laws and policies, be an instructional leader, and successfully complete many tasks in any given school day that directly and indirectly affect student achievement. Most assistant principals would agree that the tasks directly associated with instructional leadership should be at the top of the list of priorities. The perspectives of elementary assistant principals’ roles as instructional leaders will be examined in this study to explore the attitudes, values, and beliefs of assistant principals.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study was to explore elementary level assistant principals' perspectives of their roles as instructional leaders and assess those perspectives in light of current research on instructional leadership. The study examined assistant principals at the elementary school level, why they initially chose the position and chose to remain in it, their personal vision for the position, and what actually occurred day-to-day from their own perspectives. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What does it mean to assistant principals to be instructional leaders?
2. Are the actual duties and responsibilities of assistant principals congruent with the literature of instructional leadership?
3. What facilitates and/or hinders the assistant principals' instructional leadership work?

Crotty (1998) stated the four basic elements of any research process:

1. The methodology (the strategy, plan of action, process or design) governing the choice and use of methods.
2. The theoretical perspective, or philosophical stance, behind the methodology chosen that provides a context for the process.
3. The epistemology, or theory of knowledge, informing the theoretical perspective.
4. The methods, techniques, and procedures utilized to gather and analyze data.

The term *methodology* refers to the “manner in which researchers identify problems and examine answers” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 3). The research design follows a qualitative approach: “Qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought process, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 11). Although qualitative research does not include the statistics of quantitative research, its theory must be meaningful and relevant to the participants’ studies, therefore maintaining its own criteria of legitimacy (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1999). Descriptive data, as opposed to data produced by quantitative methods, include people’s own words and observable behavior. This information can lead to an understanding of people from their own frames of reference and their reality as they have experienced it (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 7). According to Creswell (1994), “The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument” (p. 145). Due to the fact that this study sought to collect assistant principals’ perceptions of their own ideas regarding instructional leadership, conducting a quantitative study would have forced them to select predetermined responses and would not have lead to “an authentic understanding of people’s experiences” (Silverman, 2000, p. 10). Using the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis enabled a continuous discovery of ideas rather than the simple results of testing an idea.

The first section of chapter 3 relates the study to the theoretical framework: symbolic interactionism. The second section explains epistemology. The site and sample selection process, including descriptions of each individual participating in the study, is found in the third section. The fourth section describes data collection procedures. The fifth section explains the process

and techniques used in analyzing data, including the stages and components of constant comparative analysis. The final section presents credibility criteria followed by the researcher.

Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is the theoretical framework for this study of assistant principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership role. Symbolic interactionism, traced back to the work of George Herbert Mead, examines social perspectives, meanings, gestures, symbols, and definitions. The researcher using this approach is interested in the following:

1. How people define themselves, others, their surroundings, and activities.
2. How people's definitions and perspectives develop and change.
3. The relationship between different people's perspectives.
4. The relationship between people's perspectives and their activities.
5. The way in which people handle the discrepancy between their perspectives and activities (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 146).

Symbolic interactionism places extreme importance on the social meaning people affix to the world around them and, according to Blumer (1969), has three basic conditions. First, people interact in situations and with people based on the meanings these things and people have for them. Secondly, meanings are social products that emanate from interaction; from other people in their lives, people develop ways of viewing things. The third idea is that people affix meanings to situations through interpretation. People respond differently based on their experiences and social backgrounds.

Through all interactions, assistant principals construct meanings. This study attempted to comprehend meanings that nine assistant principals gave to their positions and instructional leadership and how they thought their job and all its aspects impacted student achievement. Their

perceptions were indispensable to this study. According to symbolic interactionism, a shared perspective exists when a number of individuals in a similar situation define the situation in a like manner (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). This study addressed these shared perspectives of assistant principals in relation to how they viewed their work and instructional leadership. Blumer (1969) determined that symbolic interactionism demands that data be gathered from within the social world being studied. To do so in this study required that assistant principals be observed and interviewed during the data collection process. During the study, data was explored and analyzed continually. In the end, findings were interpreted and related to theories that were representative of what was occurring in the specific context of the elementary instructional assistant principals selected to participate.

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), “All organizations, cultures, and groups consist of actors who are involved in a constant process of interpreting the world around them. . . . It is their interpretations and definitions of the situation that determine action, not their norms, values, roles, or goals” (p. 12). Individuals act based on their interaction with others and their interactions within themselves and, as a result, are always changing (Charon, 2001). Assistant principals in this study were afforded opportunities to express their views based on personal experiences, which provided data required for research. They were able to explain how they viewed the world and the meaning they assigned to their job in context of that world.

Epistemology: Constructionism

The epistemology informing the researcher’s theoretical perspective was constructionism. Meaning is constructed based on human experiences (Crotty, 1998). As individuals become involved in their jobs, they create the meaning those jobs have for them. Meaning is made of that which surrounds us. All reality, as meaningful reality, is socially constructed. Likewise, those

who become assistant principals choose to do so because, based on their experiences and training, they believe they are best suited for the position. Their perspective of their own role is the meaningful truth that job holds for them. This view, perspective, is the truth to them. Based on Crotty's (1998) description of a theoretical framework, the social science research that the researcher of this study most identified with is research that seeks to understand. In this study, the researcher attempted to comprehend and interpret perspectives of assistant principals as instructional leaders.

Site and Sample Selection

According to Merriam (1998), "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. 61). The researcher identified practicing elementary assistant principals from a variety of backgrounds whose job was that of instructional leader. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), an ideal setting to conduct research is one where the observer has easy access, establishes instant rapport, and can collect data directly related to research questions. The participants in the study were serving as elementary instructional assistant principals in the T. Lake School District [pseudonym]. This particular county was chosen due to its diversity and accessibility.

The suburban school system had a student population of almost 100,000. The second largest school system in the state, it had 83 elementary schools. It was "informally" divided into three areas, the north, which consisted of predominately upper income level Caucasian families; the east, which was mostly affluent African-American families; and the south, which was home to those in the lower income level. T. Lake School District, which was made up of 77% African American, 11% Caucasian, 6% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 2% multi-racial students, was well

known for its diverse student population representing hundreds of countries and foreign languages. Subjects were drawn from throughout the different areas of the county.

T. Lake School District was the district in which the researcher was currently employed at the time of the study. The researcher had contacts throughout the county who assisted with accessibility. Many researchers have used their personal experiences as a resource for understanding the perspective and experiences of others (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The researcher used her awareness of the position to enable her to formulate questions that provided inquiry into the position and participants' perception of the position.

To understand assistant principals' experiences with instructional leadership, this study was conducted in a district where assistant principals for instruction exist. According to Glickman (1985), to select an appropriate sample, the following primary duties of instructional leadership were used: (a) direct assistance to teachers, (b) group development, (c) staff development, (d) curriculum development, and (e) action research. The elementary assistant principals whose primary responsibilities were to adhere to these duties were invited to participate.

The purpose of sampling in a qualitative study is to maximize information through information-rich data sources, not to facilitate generalization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, samples are usually determined on an ongoing basis as the study progresses (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This procedure, theoretical sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, includes limitless avenues of inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It recommends continuing to gather data until reaching the theoretical saturation point, where one has obtained in-depth understanding of subjects and subject matter. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), "Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst

jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop this theory as it emerges” (p. 45).

At the end of the school year, the researcher gained consent from the Internal Review Board of the University and the T. Lake School District to conduct her research. A letter from the researcher, which explained the nature and purpose of the study, was sent to every current elementary school assistant principal of instruction (API) in the T. Lake School District. The researcher provided contact information. A list of potential participants was generated from the return response. The researcher anticipated a good response from individuals willing to participate.

Initially, the researcher was contacted by five assistant principals eager to participate. Additional participants were selected based on the principles of theoretical sampling. As concepts started to emerge from the data, additional participants are chosen based on how they might contribute to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), “The aim of theoretical sampling is to maximize opportunities to compare events, incidents, or happenings to determine how a category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions” (p. 242). In this study, the first few participants were assistant principals with limited experience: They had worked with one principal in one school. By interviewing assistant principals with a variety of experiences in terms of years in education and years in the assistant principal role, the researcher was able to compare their perspectives with those of “newer” assistant principals. Helping to vary conditions, participants in different areas of the county volunteered. A total of nine participants were interviewed. Those individuals were later contacted for the purpose of further explanation and inquiry on the part of the researcher. They were provided with information related to the general purpose of the study, the expected

duration of the study, the procedure for data collection, and the details of confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and a professional information form was completed by each participant.

Data Collection

Data collection methods were selected based on the purpose of the study and the information desired by the researcher. The purpose of this study was to explore elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their roles as instructional leaders and assess those perspectives in light of prevailing literature. Data collection was guided by the following research questions:

1. What does it mean to assistant principals to be instructional leaders?
2. Are the actual duties and responsibilities of assistant principals congruent with the literature of instructional leadership?
3. What facilitates and/or hinders the assistant principals' instructional leadership work?

Data were collected through interviews, documents, and fieldnotes.

Interviews

Interviews were the primary method for gathering data: "The qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (Kvale, 1996, p. 2). According to Patton (1980), "The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, . . . not to put things in someone's mind but rather to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (p. 196). As a participant in the interview process, the researcher must allow the interviewees a chance to express themselves and must listen

intently in order to comprehend what is going on according to their perspectives. Typically, the qualitative interview is semi-structured. Interviews are a forum for listening, and the interviewer should say as little as possible.

An interview guide assisted with the initial direction of the interview. Although the guide helped to ensure that all main topics were covered with all participants, the researcher listened carefully to cues given by the interviewee and followed responses with relevant and probing questions. In the grounded theory approach, an attempt is made through the analysis of the data to allow a theoretical interpretation to emerge from what is seen and heard (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As a result of interviews with assistant principals, insight continued to deepen throughout the process; eventually, theoretical ideas and implications for principals, school systems, and future research emerged.

Interviews began with a discussion of basic background information about assistant principal being interviewed. Probe questions were used to ease into the questions on the interview guide. Inquiry regarding experiences, challenges, and accomplishments gave the researcher a view of perspectives the participants had of their position. These initial questions also contributed to an important theme discovered following transcription. Eight of the nine participants explained their socialization into the role of assistant principal as occurring while in a teaching capacity. They described their informal and formal teacher leader experiences that socialized them as assistant principals. One participant, Mia, explained, “you are in the role and transitioning even as a teacher, and then you move into the role, and it catches up with where you are in terms of your duties and responsibilities, and you are an assistant principal at that point.”

The initial interviews lasted approximately 45-90 minutes each, depending on the individual participants. Some participants, Mia Clark and Mary Eirhart, spoke freely and needed

little prompting. Other participants, such as Maxine Kelly, preferred to give a direct answer to each question, waiting for the interviewer to ask her further questions. Follow-up interviews, conducted at a later date, lasted approximately 20-45 minutes each. All interviews were audiotaped for the purpose of transcription and data analysis. The researcher completed all transcriptions herself. According to Kvale (1996), “Investigators may choose to do their own transcribing in order to secure the many details relevant to their specific analysis. . . . The transcribing experience will make interviewers aware of some of the many decisions involved in transforming oral speech to written texts” (p. 169). Kvale also emphasized the role of memory in helping the researcher contextualize the transcription:

An interview may be recorded through taking notes during or writing down aspects after the interview session. The interviewer’s immediate memory will, however, include the visual information of the situation as well as the social atmosphere and personal interaction, which to a large extent is lost in the audiotaped recording. The interviewer’s active listening and remembering may ideally also work as a selective filter, retaining those very meanings that are essential for the topic and purpose of the study. (p. 161)

The researcher captured the exact words of the participants, transcribed the audiotapes, and repeatedly reviewed and reflected on the transcriptions.

Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), helped the researcher reflect on the collected data. Notes were taken during the interviews as discreetly as possible. Often, there were particular topics or ideas that needed further exploration; notes assisted in recollection for later discussion. They also assisted in recalling gestures or facial expressions, which provided additional insight. Fieldnotes were also taken during the second round of interviews, including descriptions of people, settings, events, and conversations, as well as the researcher’s responses to what was observed (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In one particular interview, with Patti Giovanni, fieldnotes helped capture the events that took place during the interview. Several interruptions

kept the discussion from flowing. A secretary needing kindergarten assessment data, a voice on the walkie-talkie, the ringing telephone, and e-mail pop-ups contributed to the chaos that characterized her typical day.

Documents

Documents are written texts that are important to research because the information differs from and may not be available in spoken form and because they provide historical insight (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Documents collected were those that provided insight into the world of the assistant principalship as well as the individual schools. The researcher anticipated that the documents would provide information that would aid in understanding experiences of the assistant principals participating in the study. Four of the schools where participants were working had particular models that helped to develop their perspectives of instructional leadership. Although the schools did not choose to be a part of these particular academic models, participants' words indicated they had a tremendous effect on their role within the organization. According to the assistant principals, these mandated models were put into place before they arrived in their positions. Documents explaining purposes of and details regarding these models were used to develop a more comprehensive vision of these programs.

Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data can be described as “an organic whole that begins in the data-gathering stage and does not end until the writing is completed” (Potter, 1996, p. 120). As she collected data, the researcher of this study examined that data and began to organize it into themes and categories.

A main goal of the researcher was to shed light on the perspectives of the assistant principals on instructional leadership. As patterns emerged, they were noted by the researcher. In

constant comparative analysis, every piece of data is compared with every other piece. This process was challenging for the researcher. The purpose of the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory systematically (Glaser, 1994). Considered an inductive method of theory development, the analyst must elicit abstract similarities and differences in the data. The constant comparative method compels the analyst to compare each incident with other incidents or properties of a category. Comparison was a recurring task carried out by the researcher that eventually generated theoretical ideas. The researcher examined the data from day one and immediately began to code, categorize, conceptualize, and record written thoughts. Following constant comparative analysis methods, the researcher took the characteristics of assistant principals' experiences and compared them with attributes of other assistant principals' experiences to uncover similarities and differences and produce understanding or meaning about assistant principals' perspectives of their instructional leadership roles. As data were analyzed, common themes emerged. However, this analysis was a long, detailed process. The researcher would identify what she thought was a category or theme, but as data collection continued, she would find that it would either lose importance or merge into another category or theme. The purpose of constant comparative analysis was to generate theory more systematically than explicit coding and analytic procedures allow (Glaser, 1992). Constant comparative analysis includes stages (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Stages of Constant Comparative Analysis

Comparing Incidents

The first stage was to compare the data applicable to each conceptual category: “The analyst starts by coding each incident in the data into as many categories of analysis as possible, as categories emerge or as data emerge to fit an existing category” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.

185). The researcher structured all first-round interviews in the same format, noting codes from the very first interview and allowing categories to emerge only after numerous participants had been interviewed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In subsequent interviews, new relevant categories emerged, or data would fit into existing categories (Glaser, 1994). With time and careful examination, theoretical properties surfaced.

Integrating Categories and Their Properties

Next, categories and their properties were integrated: “As the coding continues, the constant comparative units change from comparison of incident with incident to comparison of incident with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparisons of incidents” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 188). Categories came together slowly, only after many readings and reworkings. It was important that the researcher not miss anything from the data; therefore, she examined the data from several different angles, which entailed reading the transcriptions and fieldnotes many times. The themes and categories were reworked all the way through the final stages of analysis.

“Modifications are made in order to clarify the logic, take out nonrelevant properties, integrate elaborate details of properties into the major outline of interrelated categories and—most important—reduction” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 189). The original number of categories was reduced at this time, enabling the researcher to become more focused on incidents clearly applicable to the study (Glaser, 1994). The researcher looked for theoretical saturation during data analysis. This saturation occurred when incidents arose for existing categories and did not lend a new aspect (Glaser, 1994). At this point, follow-up interviews were conducted with each of the participants as the researcher attempted to confirm her ideas. The participants indicated

agreement with the themes and categories. In a few cases, the assistant principals offered new thoughts relating to those themes and categories.

Following the previous stages, the researcher articulated statements, or theoretical ideas, about what was studied (Glaser, 1994). The researcher brought together everything about assistant principals in the categories in order to summarize the data. Finally, theoretical ideas were written. The researcher revisited the coded data to find specific examples to validate and illustrate theoretical ideas (Glaser, 1994). These specific examples are included in chapter 4.

Components of Constant Comparative Analysis

Components of constant comparative analysis were necessary to the development of the researcher's study: theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and theoretical pacing.

Theoretical Sensitivity

Effective theoretical coding is largely enhanced by theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1994), which includes professional knowledge, research experiences, and personal experiences that the researcher brings to her inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher of this study had had many experiences acting as an instructional leader while working as an assistant principal. These experiences provided the researcher with an understanding of the events in the research setting. Theoretical sensitivity was also present due to the knowledge the researcher had of the background literature on instructional leadership and the assistant principalship.

Theoretical Sampling

In qualitative research, samples are defined on an ongoing basis as the study progresses (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This procedure, used during data collection, coding, and analysis, includes finding supplementary cases to study, depending on the potential of gaining new insight

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, the researcher used theoretical sampling to guide data collection. Theoretical sampling continued until “it was saturated, elaborated, and integrated into the emerging theory” (Glaser, 1992, p. 102).

Theoretical Saturation

When data appears to have become repetitive, data collection ends. This point, known as theoretical saturation, occurs when no new insights can be gained (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The researcher must decide when to conclude data collection, which can sometimes be an emotional event based on the relationships developed during the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this study, theoretical saturation began to occur after the seventh interview of the initial set of interviews; the researcher chose to conduct two additional interviews to ensure saturation. The researcher found it difficult to conclude data collection because she enjoyed learning about the perspectives and experiences of the assistant principals, and she saw the personal benefit to the participants to share that information confidentially.

Theoretical Pacing

According to Glaser (1994), as categories and their properties emerge, time should be taken to reflect and carry thinking to logical conclusions. Glaser emphasized that the time spent each day with data input is dependant on the relevance of the material, saturation of categories, emergence of new categories, and the stage of formulation of theory. In this study, all ideas that emerged were constantly noted as memos, on a daily basis. Equal time was spent on data collection and analysis (Glaser, 1992), and the researcher was actively reading and/or writing every day of the process.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the research process and ideas generated from that process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is important that the findings of a qualitative study be an accurate representation of the participants' realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The criteria used to increase credibility of the study are discussed below.

Fit, Work, Relevance

Discovery and theory development happens through collecting and analyzing data simultaneously, which serves to strengthen credibility (Glaser, 1994). *Fit* means that categories developed from what the researcher actually saw and/or heard. The theories should always be traceable to the data. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), "The theory should fit the data" (p. 201). By conducting interviews with the participants, the researcher avoided forcing the data to fit into the theory.

Work means that the theory generated accurately explains what was happening in the research setting: "By 'work' we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behaviors under study" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This accuracy was verified by conducting follow-up interviews with the participants, obtaining their input regarding the categories determined, and obtaining clarification when necessary.

Relevance is a study's applicability; when categories are pertinent to the study, it becomes meaningful. Core problems and processes emerge, contributing to relevance (Glaser, 1992). Categories and themes emerged from the data collected and analyzed by the researcher.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a mode of inquiry that includes the use of several kinds of methods or data to achieve broader and more accurate results (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Multiple

participants were interviewed to gain multiple perspectives. Documents and fieldnotes provided verification of participants' responses.

Member Checks

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that researchers cross-check their work through member checks. Member checking includes sharing data, findings, and interpretations with the research participants and providing them with an opportunity to challenge or agree with what is written (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher summarized main ideas during the interviews, asking for clarification, if necessary, from the participants. Also, insights obtained from interviews were used to develop questions for other participants. An additional method of member checking was the use of follow-up interviews with the participants to confirm or reject the researcher's findings as well as to obtain additional information based on initial coding.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is the process of communicating with a peer to obtain an external check of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher relied on a peer who had been through the process of dissertation research for peer debriefing. This peer provided insight and was an active listener. This method contributed to the credibility of research findings and therefore was used in this study.

Thick Description

A thick description is a written representation that clarifies the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organize the experience, and reveals the experience as a process from which truth arises (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this study, a thick description of the site and sample selection, research settings, and data collection and analysis was provided. This approach guaranteed transferability of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Reliability, Validity, Generalizability

To maintain credibility, the researcher must meet the following standards:

1. *Reliability* is defined as a thing or idea to be trusted or relied on; dependable and trustworthy.
2. *Validity* is founded on truth or fact; capable of being justified or defended.
3. *Generalizability* is relating to or covering all instances. The findings can be applied to other locations.

Blumer (1969) recognized that as part of human nature, researchers have preconceived notions about what they study. He advised that the researcher make “a conscientious and continuous effort to test and revise one’s images” (p. 37). The researcher recognized her own subjectivity and thus attempted to minimize its effect even though “all observations are filtered through the researcher’s lens” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 160). The researcher constantly reflected upon her biases in order to minimize their influence on the study.

The extent to which participants were willing to contribute and share openly and honestly impacted validity. Because they were employed in the same school district as the researcher, it is possible that some participants were hesitant to divulge information. On several occasions, a response from a participant was preceded by “This is confidential, right?” A strong effort was made to ensure confidentiality and trustworthiness on behalf of the researcher.

In the same respect, because the researcher was also a practicing assistant principal in the same school district, a heightened level of trust developed, which led to the openness important to any investigation: “Moral research behavior is more than ethical knowledge and cognitive choices; it involves the person of the researcher, his or her sensitivity and commitment to moral issues and action” (Kvale, 1996, p. 117). A few of the participants wanted to discuss the

researcher's perspectives. Every effort was made to explain gently the significance of their experiences, rather than those of the researcher, for the study.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), findings are generalizable if they “hold up beyond the specific research subjects and the setting involved” (p. 32). In this study, the researcher intended for the findings to benefit other elementary instructional assistant principals. By sharing collected data, the researcher made information about the position and the individuals filling the position available to others.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a thorough description of the methodology used in the study. The study followed the symbolic interactionist perspective. Interviews, documents, and fieldnotes were the primary data sources. Constant comparative analysis was utilized to code and analyze data. Strategies such as triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing were used to enhance credibility of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary assistant principals' perspectives of their roles as instructional leaders and assess those perceptions in light of current research on instructional leadership. This research was conducted to investigate elementary assistant principals' experiences with instructional leadership and the barriers and/or facilitators that exist for them as instructional leaders.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the research, including the participants' own words. The first section introduces each of the nine participants. The second section presents the three main themes and 14 categories that emerged from a comparative analysis of the data.

Participants' Individual Profiles

This section provides a brief profile of each participant (see Figure 1). The information presented creates a snapshot of each participant, including important ideas uncovered during the data collection process.

Mia Clark

Mia had worked at her current school for 12 years. She began as a third-grade teacher directly out of college and had been promoted four years before the time of this study. Due to the nature of the principal when she was promoted, she was able to reinvent the job as she saw fit. The principal was preparing for retirement, and according to Mia, "She was very supportive, but she was very hands-off in terms of whatever I wanted to do." Mia considered this autonomy a

“gold mine.” Mia’s philosophy of the position was one of an instructional leader. Her message was clear to her principal: “I am not going to be an office assistant principal.

| Name | Years of Experience as a Classroom Teacher | Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal | Total Years of Experience in Education |
|-------------------|--|---|--|
| Mia Clark | 8 | 4 | 12 |
| Karen Stephenson | 12 | 4 | 16 |
| Lori Cape | 7 | 3 | 10 |
| Brad Schillinger | 7 | 2 | 9 |
| Patti Giovanni | 14 | 6 | 20 |
| Maxine Kelly | 3 ½ | 27 | 30 ½ |
| Mary Earhart | 18 | 16 | 34 |
| Elizabeth Charles | 8 | 7 | 15 |
| Vicki Masters | 12 | 5 | 17 |

Figure 1: Professional Information

Mia originally felt, in general, that an assistant principal’s effectiveness as a leader could be compromised if he/she was promoted to the position in the same school where he/she had served as a teacher. Her outlook altered when she was put in this situation. Mia was already performing different leadership tasks and felt people already saw her in a leadership capacity.

I think it is typical that you are in the role and transitioning even as a teacher, and then you move into the role and it catches up with where you are in terms of your duties and responsibilities, and you are an assistant principal at that point.

Mia felt that the teacher-leader experience made her realize that she enjoyed leadership and being involved in the total school program. During the eight years she had been a classroom teacher, Mia worked under four different assistant principals, which helped her to see many differences.

It helped me to see that people can truly be in the job and they have their own individual way of doing it and they are still fulfilling the role, but they have a different emphasis. They have different areas that they pay attention to. . . . I saw several different people

come into the same job at the same school, and each put their own little stamp of this is what matters to me.

Mia had worked with two principals during her brief tenure as an assistant principal and shared that “the whole idea of principals being instructional leaders is rare.” Mia had recently been interviewing for the principalship and was certain that she wanted to bring a real emphasis on teaching and learning to the position. She explained her reservation about becoming a principal:

I will be very dissatisfied with myself and the job if I am not able to function in the role of instructional leader. My hope is and my belief is that the thing that makes a good school different from a so-so school or a great school from a good school is that the principal is instructionally focused and that the principal is really fulfilling that role as an instructional leader.

Lori Cape

Lori’s “journey” to the assistant principalship had begun nine years prior to the time of this study, when she started teaching kindergarten right out of college. It was then that she was introduced to different school leadership roles. Even though Lori had not envisioned leadership in her future, all three of the principals she had worked with during her seven years as a classroom teacher had: “[They] saw some qualities in me that I did not even know existed. . . . There were three while I was there [teaching at the school] who saw leadership abilities in me.”

Lori felt her experiences during her “journey” had given her the knowledge of curriculum, some experience with instructional leadership, the ability to build a positive school climate, and the teamwork and cooperativeness that she needed. Her rapport with staff members as a teacher had developed from her experiences with sharing theories about teaching and learning. She felt strongly about the trickle-down effect regarding school climate: “If you get everyone to buy in, our school runs better. Happy teachers make happy children. Happy children make happy parents.”

Lori possessed strong convictions regarding the importance of the assistant principalship to the total school, stating, “I believe that if we took the assistant principal position away and just had the principals and teachers, I think we might have a collapse of the building.” She viewed the position as one that is imperative to school success and one in which the person inhabiting it “does it all,” including sweeping the cafeteria floor, if necessary.

At the time of the study, Lori had begun to see the position change due to the newly added policies and procedures that were proving to be quite a challenge:

It was a lot of pressure for me last year. I told my principal that even my first year, even when I was learning the position, was much easier than last year. This is because of initiatives that were just not necessarily mandated by the county, but by federal and state guidelines.

She felt these initiatives, “beyond the locus of control,” had been most inhibiting to her as an instructional leader. She would not let it debilitate her. Lori was a strong person and made it clear that nothing would stand in the way of her doing the job to the best of her ability.

Brad Schillinger

Brad’s “fall into education” seemed to suit him comfortably. After being introduced to the teaching field by friends, he began teaching music education. He enjoyed directly teaching children but began considering administration when the “big push about accountability” arose. He thought, “If I am going to be held accountable for everything they say we are going to be held accountable for, then I think I may need to look at new roles and maybe getting in a better place.” He felt the assistant principalship was where he needed to go.

Brad had taught for seven years before being promoted within his school when the assistant principal retired. He enjoyed his current position, one which he viewed as a “workhorse job” filled with a list of duties and tasks that had to be completed on a daily basis: “The work is constant. There is something all of the time.” Although he shared his title with another in the

building (there were two assistant principals), he still viewed the lack of time as a barrier to his ability to be an instructional leader. Because of erratic days filled with constant interruptions, Brad felt only 5% of his average day was spent directly on curriculum and instruction.

His time spent with third-grade teachers and students (this grade was chosen for additional assistance due to the high stakes testing placed upon them by the state) had a large positive impact on academic achievement. But he consistently talked about “keeping their [teachers] interruptions down to a minimum” as an important instructional duty he had adopted. Visitors were not allowed to go to the classrooms. They were stopped at the front office, required to sign in and obtain a visitor’s badge to wear, and escorted to their destination. This procedure had as much an instructional function as a security function. Brad explained, “Just making sure teachers understand that we are doing our best to make sure their classroom time is uninterrupted and that the class time they have is put to good use is a big thing we do for instruction.” Brad was certain that this value of uninterrupted instructional time was received from the principal’s attitude and was shared throughout the school building.

Patti Giovanni

Patti’s experience in education had spanned 24 years. She spoke of changes that were occurring at the county office level as well as the state level and saw those changes as having an impact on the role of the assistant principal:

As the school system’s focus changed, many of us changed our focus from discipline to instruction . . . because we had to increase student achievement. Under the former superintendent and deputy superintendents, instruction became the focus, the real focus. The state was changing their curriculum and their expectations.

At the time of this study, Patti was responsible for discipline as part of her job and explained the important connection between instruction and discipline. Although she felt that “you cannot teach children you cannot discipline,” discipline was not a gratifying part of her job.

Patti explained, “The assistant principals do everything. . . . They wear many different hats.” She went further to insist that “instruction is first and foremost,” consuming “98%” of her day. She explained, “The paperwork and the managing of your instructional program is basically done after school,” illustrating why her work hours were extreme. Patti unlocked the building at 6:30 in the morning and locked up the building at night on most days. During our interview, we were interrupted several times by people knocking on the door, signaling on the two-way radio, and calling on the telephone; even e-mails consistently came through indicated by a bell on her computer. These interruptions demonstrated just how many demands she had to meet on a daily basis.

Patti viewed herself as well as her principal as the instructional leaders of the school and had a definitive idea of instructional leadership:

It means leading your group, your congregation, based on the data you receive, leading them into achieving the goals set for the school. Making sure that the best practices that you have put into place or that you think you have mastered yourself and have put into place . . . have been rolled out into the classrooms.

Patti was confident in her ability as an instructional leader and said one thing that helped her to achieve her goals was her principal: “I have a good instructional leader.” She went further to state, when asked how she knew she was an instructional leader, “because I lead. Because I take responsibility for all that happens in this school. Although all of that responsibility is not mine, I take that responsibility, and I take ownership of that responsibility.”

Karen Stephenson

Karen had taught at two different schools before transitioning into administration. During her 12 years as a classroom teacher, under the direction of three different principals, she received encouragement to become an assistant principal. Karen felt that an assistant principal’s instructional leadership role depends on many variables.

Every assistant principal has a different role depending on who they are working with. . . . I think every assistant principal's role is going to be different because of all of the situations they are in, whether it is their own role personally, what the school is like, the size of the school, the people they work with, demographics, the whole thing.

Karen strongly valued the difficult position teachers hold and reiterated her respect for them throughout our conversations together. She had always felt and continued to feel that “classroom teachers have the most difficult job in the building.” She said she spent a large portion of her first year in school administration defending teachers. She was bothered by the lack of trust principals and assistant principals had demonstrated toward teachers. Karen was clearly an advocate for teachers and saw that support as a direct link to supporting students: “I feel like it is important that I support classroom teachers, that I do what I can do to make their jobs easier so that they can do their jobs to help children because that is the bottom line.”

Due to “working with a very strong leader,” Karen felt she had been inhibited from exercising leadership. Her frustration stemmed from lack of support from her principal, and she explained, “Many of the decisions I made, questions that I answered, were overridden, and so I found that I had to take very much of a back seat to what were the decisions made in the school.” It had been difficult for her to find her “fit.” She felt that staff members definitely picked up on the dissention among their school leaders, though the conflicts were “not a reflection on my ability.”

Karen was looking forward to working with a different type of school leader during the upcoming school year. The principal was being replaced by an individual new to the position. Although Karen did not know the new principal that well, she was looking forward to establishing a new relationship that would include mutual support and working as a team, something missing from the relationship with her former principal.

Maxine Kelly

Maxine had worked many years as an instructional leader. Twenty-seven years before the time of this study, she began with the title of “Lead Teacher,” which eventually changed into “Assistant Principal” after 18 years. She remembered enjoying her initial leadership position because it afforded her the opportunity to continue to teach. She explained, “I started as a lead teacher—it was called *teacher* because you were required to teach at least part of the day. I taught one class, and I was the last [lead teacher] in the county to keep doing that because I loved it so.”

Maxine claimed that the key to being a successful assistant principal was flexibility. “Everyday I can have what I think I am going to get to do, and you walk in and meet the day with whatever new challenges are there for you.” She also explained the importance of having a perspective of the whole school:

You have to think about how something would impact parents and students and teachers. That is what you kind of have to do. You have to get the global view of everything. You have to realize that it is a domino effect. If you just do this, if you change one thing, it kind of affects lunch, or the schedule, or something all the way down the line.

This veteran of administration saw the leadership she possessed as a “sixth sense” that helped her know what to look for and how to orchestrate for the benefit of children.

Besides the change in her job title, she had witnessed several other changes within the district in which she was working. She expressed, “When [assistant principals] started out, we were the only ones ever trained on any of the programs. We were the “pipelines of knowledge from the county.” She went further to state, “Now it has become a train-the-trainer type of model involving the teachers. I think as instructional leaders, we are kind of left out of the loop in the real nitty-gritty. They get some of the training, but not the training on how to apply it to the whole school.” She shared her frustration with both ways because although “it is a little harder

trying to put it together [teachers being partially trained], . . . it was also very, very hard being the fount of all knowledge.”

The one thing that had not changed, according to Maxine, was the time required by the job. She explained, “It is not an eight-hour day, and it is not a five-day week. I go in most Sundays and work.” She feels that extra time is mandatory for an instructional leader. Although the additional hours had not bothered her in the past, she experienced unhappiness the past school year, feeling that the extra time was only necessary to input data. She shared, “I feel like we have become more of a data input person. . . . I have felt less satisfied with what I was able to do in terms of instruction because so much time was spent on that.” Although she had added pressure from what she saw as a change in the position, it was clear after our conversations together and my observations of her at work that Maxine was where she wanted to be: “I love what I do. I found my spot. I used to think I wanted to be a coordinator or something else, but I love where I am.”

Mary Earhart

Mary had been in the field of education as a classroom teacher for 36 years. Like Maxine, she transitioned into the role of “lead teacher” prior to inheriting the title of “assistant principal.” She continued to see herself as being in a “helping role more than an administrative role” and said she had felt that from when she first became a lead teacher. She explained a feature of that position:

When I first became an ILT [instructional lead teacher], we were teacher advocates and [teachers] saw you as that. As soon as we were trained to do formal observations, it affected the relationship with the staff. So I like that [the principal] does them because they don’t see me in that same light. I think it is better for instruction if you don’t have to do it formally. Because you can then go in there and sit down and without it being threatening in any way say, “Let’s talk about your lesson today.” They tell you, “What did you think about...?” I don’t like what happened to ILT as it became assistant

principal. People bought in because they really thought I was trying to help them. Sometimes they don't think I am trying to help them anymore.

Mary had worked at Smithtown Elementary for her 16 years as an administrator. Although frequently asked, like Maxine, she also did not desire the principalship, stating,

I don't like discipline. I don't like dealing with that, and I am not a good PR person. I think that is what good principals have to do in a small school. They have to deal with parents all of the time. Not that I mind talking with a parent about instruction, but I don't like dealing with them with anything else.

Elizabeth Charles

Elizabeth had served 7 of her 15 years in education as an assistant principal at Roberts Elementary School. When asked about the assistant principalship, Elizabeth said,

You have all of the responsibilities and none of the paybacks. You still have to do so many things that the principal does. The good part is that there is always someone above to get blamed if you do it wrong. The bad side is you don't always get credit for the things you do, the creativity things.

Elizabeth started a second career as a teacher because she found herself wanting to know why things had been done at her child's school a certain way. She maintained that curiosity as she decided she wanted to become an assistant principal:

You have to communicate, and most people won't always agree with what it is you have to say. But if you can explain your thinking, you can get them to buy into it. "I am not happy that we have to do this, but in the long run, it is going to be good for our kids." I think if you don't issue directives and you can explain the thinking, . . . I think that is part of why I wanted to be an assistant principal. I like to know why we are doing things, not just, "Do this by this amount of time." I like to know why.

Even though the mixed signals she received from her current principal did not always make her feel valued as an instructional leader, Elizabeth took her instructional role very seriously. She was clear about how she felt about supporting teachers and students and still making time to read to students when she could: "There are a lot of days when I am

overwhelmed with paperwork and I will grab a Dr. Seuss book and read to a class. The kids really bring it back. It is like, 'Okay, this is what I was here to do today.'”

Vicki Masters

Vicki had begun looking toward administration as a career goal after having “worked under several different principals in the same county and seeing the different leadership styles, and seeing the kinds of things they did and wanting to be an advocate for change.” Although she felt she had been able to initiate change at her school, she felt her effort had been limited due to the added pressures and duties that occurred each year: “Every year has gotten more difficult. When you are in a role it should get easier, but I think they put more demands on us from one year to the next, and it gets more difficult because we don’t have any more time.”

Kendle Elementary School had a noted reputation for high test scores. Vicki viewed this reputation as having an impact on their parents, instructional program, and school culture. She discussed the parents at her school on several occasions: “The parents are so demanding that you can’t be here without being on your toes. If you aren’t on your toes, you don’t last long. The parents really do have a strong influence.” Vicki said that a portion of her day everyday was spent communicating with parents by e-mail, telephone, and conferences. Vicki considered it important that she make a difference in the lives of children. She said, “Often, I leave here at the end of the day and I think, ‘Now, did I do anything to impact student achievement and really make a difference with teachers?’ That is where my focus is.”

Common Themes

At the conclusion of the data analysis process, three main themes emerged from the information base as important to assistant principals’ perspectives of their instructional leadership role. The nine assistant principal participants in this study mentioned six kinds of

influences on their primary roles as instructional leaders, which was to ensure that learning was taking place. Four actions taken by assistant principals were seen as having the greatest impact on student learning, and four desired outcomes surfaced. Figure 2 presents an outline of the three themes and fourteen categories (see also Appendix C). In this section, these themes and categories are explained using verbatim examples from the participants’ interview responses.

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|--|----------------------------------|
| Theme 1: Influences on Assistant Principals’ Instructional Leadership Role | |
| Category 1: Early Leadership Experiences | Category 4: Management Duties |
| Category 2: Principal’s Practices | Category 5: Faculty and Staff |
| Category 3: Local, State, and Federal Mandates | Category 6: Personal Motivation |
| Theme 2: Assistant Principals’ Actions as Instructional Leaders | |
| Category 7: Monitoring | Category 9: Sharing Knowledge |
| Category 8: Commitment | Category 10: Providing Resources |
| Theme 3: Desired Outcomes of Instructional Leadership | |
| Category 11: Collaboration | Category 13: Trust |
| Category 12: Support | Category 14: Accessibility |

Figure 2: Common Themes and Categories

Theme 1: Influences on Assistant Principals’ Instructional Leadership Role

Every assistant principal spoke at length about the influences that helped determine how they viewed the instructional leadership role. External forces were repeatedly discussed during the interviews. Influences on their instructional leadership role perspective included the

following: (a) Early Leadership Experiences; (b) Principal's Practices; (c) Local, State, and Federal Mandates; (d) Management Duties; (e) Faculty and Staff; and (f) Personal Motivation.

Category 1: Early Leadership Experiences

Eight out of the nine participants described specific experiences they had had as classroom teachers that impacted how they viewed the role of the assistant principal and their practices while in the position. Even before formally stepping into the official role, the assistant principals were already seen as instructional leaders. Five of the assistant principals were led to their vision of instructional leadership by the principals they were working with at the time and clearly remembered the events that led to their ultimate path.

Mia, as an assistant principal with four years of experience, felt like an instructional leader very soon in her teaching career:

I had done lots of leadership kinds of things with the staff. A lot of people already saw me in a leadership capacity. There were new people who thought I was their supervisor because of my role as Teacher Support Specialist. . . . I had already been doing sort of leadership things, and so our relationship was already built on seeing me in a leadership role. True enough, I was a teacher, but I wasn't a "wallflower" kind of teacher. I was already presenting to the staff. I was doing different leadership things even before I stepped into the role.

Mia considered the time spent in the school building preparing for the assistant principalship as valuable instructional leadership training: "You are in the role and transitioning even as a teacher, and then you move into the role and it catches up with where you are in terms of your duties and responsibilities, and you are an assistant principal at that point."

Lori, a new assistant principal, described her "journey" to the assistant principalship as an outcome of her experiences as a teacher and a vision of her principal that she did not even see at the time:

[The principal] had me working on different assignments. She had me helping with testing. I helped with the discipline committee, just different leadership roles. I was the

sixth-grade, grade-level chairperson. So she saw some qualities in me that I didn't even know existed.

Lori described all of the different roles she had played within the school building due to support from the three principals she had worked with during her years as a classroom teacher: "That helped me hone in on those skills, and they saw that I was a great potential [leader] for that school."

Patti had extensive experience from being in the field of education for 23 years. Her decision to enter administration had been supported by her colleagues, who saw her as an administrator long before she officially became one.

A lot of the staff members at that time and also the administration would ask me if I would house those students demonstrating inappropriate behaviors in my classroom. And my administrators, my principal and lead teacher at that time, talked me into maybe looking at being an administrator, and I fought that for several years because I still thought I would lose touch with the real world, which was the classroom. And surely after a few years passed, I . . . became an administrator. They all promised me through the years that they would not let me lose touch. I would still have my hand in the classroom.

Patti explained how the experiences during her socialization process added to her knowledge.

I did a lot of budgeting because I was a Title I teacher at that time. I knew what instructional things needed to be ordered for the students. I knew what the materials were. We were able to attend lots and lots of conferences, reading and math. Therefore, I had a lot of background in those areas. I stayed at work very, very late. I was probably the last, other than the custodians who lock up the building, as a teacher, so therefore the custodial responsibilities became mine as a teacher. I was expected to check and make sure that it was done and help them secure the door. So when I became an assistant principal, those things were just natural.

It was difficult for Patti to differentiate things she did as a teacher and things she did as an assistant principal.

Karen had been viewed more as an instructional assistant principal than a teacher while in the classroom at the three schools where she taught. She stated, "I actually had several principals that encouraged me to go into that position because I seem to have been in several leadership

positions as a teacher in a couple of schools, so they felt like that would be a good role for me to take on.” She reluctantly pursued the job, but then felt fortunate to be promoted in the school where she was working. Karen knew from previous observation of the assistant principals she had worked with what her role would be. She saw her assistant principals fulfill duties that could have been handled by someone else. She said, “When I came in, my perception of the job came from the way it had been handled before.”

Maxine had been an administrator for most of her 30 ½ years in the field of education. Her limited experience in the classroom, one year out of state and two and a half years in Georgia, were responsible for shaping most of her perspectives of the role once she had obtained it. Maxine did talk about her principal at Township Elementary, whose ideas of shared governance were “ahead of his time”:

Township was a very different type of school, a model school. The whole thing was built on leadership, and so he had a very active leadership team, and I was a part of that. We helped make the decisions for everything that happened in the school, even the cafeteria and how things were run. It kind of evolved from that I think.

Elizabeth’s path to the field of education was not a traditional one. Her career path in marketing changed when she began wondering what had been going on in education. Serving as a substitute teacher quickly gave her the desire to know and do more. She obtained her teaching certificate and had been enjoying teaching for a few years when she was met with a surprise. She explained,

William Jet, who was the principal at my school at the time, actually called me in one day out of the blue. I thought I was in trouble. When they say, “Could you please talk to me for a minute,” you think, “What did I do?” He just said, “You know, you would make a great assistant principal.” I don’t know why he said that, but I guess they see things in people that you don’t see in yourself.

She said he explained to her that she had good communication with parents and was very organized. He told her a few other things that she could not remember, as well.

Vicki was young when she first entered the realm of administration. Her principal began giving her leadership responsibilities that she embraced while she was still teaching in the classroom. With her increased responsibility, she felt she was already doing much that constituted a leadership role. Early on, his belief in her contributed to her decision to become an administrator. He was the only one who had always told her, “I can see you as an administrator; I want you to go back to school and try different roles.”

According to the data, assistant principals developed ideas about the assistant principal as an instructional leader while being a classroom teacher. These experiences and responsibilities helped to shape their perspectives of what it means to be an instructional leader.

Category 2: Principal's Practices

All of the assistant principals interviewed mentioned their principal's influence on how they viewed their own instructional leadership role. According to their responses, the actions and words of a principal can cloud or enhance the assistant principal's vision of how instructional leadership should be and can be performed. A principal can also devalue an assistant principal. Consequently, principals have a significant impact on how well assistant principals perform as instructional leaders.

Mia's experiences with the two principals with whom she had worked had given her the freedom to do her job the way she wanted. Her principals were both “hands-off and not directive about what [was] going on in instruction.” She further stated, “I don't know if they just don't worry about it or if there are just other things to do rather than being an instructional leader.” They both afforded her the opportunity to focus on instruction by performing “duties honed on instruction and teaching and student achievement.” She explained,

But I was real clear that if it is not based on instruction, if it was not working with teachers or students, that kind of thing, we will have to figure out who else can do it. I am

not doing it. . . . What I try to do is think of things that only I can do. As assistant principal for instruction, what are the things that only I can do? And those are the things that I am going to do, and everything else I am going to figure out how do we get around it. How can we get someone else to do it?

Lori valued her relationship with her principal. She felt the way the relationship affected her instructional leadership role was important for everyone in the building. She said, “My principal trusts me, and I think that is what really fuels my fire.” This trust had been proven by her principal’s actions and words. Her principal once told her, “If I am out, I know the school is in good hands. I don’t worry.” Lori reciprocated that trust. They had developed a professional relationship that extended into a personal care for one another; Lori viewed this closeness as important to the entire school: “It is important for the leadership to have solidarity because if the head is not right, what do you expect the body to do? If the brain is not working on one accord, the body is not going to go anywhere.”

Brad had worked with his principal for five years—three and a half as a teacher and two as an assistant principal. His principal had high expectations for him as an instructional leader who could work independently. Brad saw his role as a coordinator of “a lot of assignments. You have to be very motivated. You have to be very independent.”

Karen had felt dissatisfied with the limitations placed on her instructional leadership role by her principal. She felt strongly that the assistant principal’s effectiveness as an instructional leader depends on the principal. She clarified the significance of a principal’s influence:

I think it depends upon who your principal is. Like I said, I have been working under someone who is so organized and knows everyone and everything and takes it upon herself to do whatever. I have really only taken care of my little world. I have not gotten involved in her world, and I think it depends on who your principal is. Every assistant principal has a different role depending on who they are working with. Some of the principals pass a lot of their duties off onto the assistant principal. I don’t really have a lot of her duties. I have talked to a lot of assistant principals who say they are doing this and that, and I think, “I am not responsible for that. The principal is doing that.” And I think it

just depends on who you are working with as to what . . . some of the responsibilities are, as far as reports that need to be done and things like that.

Since entering the assistant principalship, Karen had experienced difficulty in finding out exactly where she fit into her instructional leadership role.

I worked with a very strong leader who was the leader of the school, and I was not [the leader of the school]. That is probably the biggest barrier I have seen in the last three years. Many of the decisions I made and questions I answered were overridden, and so I found that I had to take very much of a backseat to what were the decisions made in the school. And it was very, very difficult for me for a while.

The lack of teamwork with the administration had produced much frustration in Karen, and the staff and faculty and had contributed to her sense of role conflict:

We don't work as a team. [The principal] does what she needs to do. And a lot of times, people come to me and ask me, and I say, "I am sorry, I don't know anything about that." And sometimes I feel foolish and embarrassed, but that is the way it is. I have learned to just look them in the eye and say, "I am sorry. That is something that is handled by the principal." And I think most people understand that is the kind of person she is and understand that is the way it is. It is not a reflection on my ability. At first I felt like it was. And now that is the way it is. People understand that is the way it is.

Karen would soon be experiencing a change in principals, and she felt that would have an influence on her instructional leadership role. She was looking forward to helping shape her role for the upcoming school year:

I think my role as assistant principal will change greatly this year because I will be working with someone who does not know [the] people, doesn't know the system, doesn't know Rosemary Elementary. The past principal came in and pretty much took control. She knew how she wanted it to be, and she worked it that way.

Maxine had always seen her support of the principals as positively impacting her own instructional leadership role:

My biggest thing was when the principal was out, trying to make sure that I made the same decisions that she wants. I might know what I want to do in that situation, but I really felt like it was her school and we were working together, and so I needed to handle it how she would want.

She had worked with three different principals and said that although there had been a “learning curve” with each, she had adjusted quickly due to their similar leadership philosophies. The trust that each principal had shared with her had given her the freedom to be a true instructional leader and take risks:

All the principals I have worked with have been very open in letting me set up any type of schedule I need for myself or for the school. They have expectations and things that they want me to accomplish, but then I am turned loose to do it in the way that they let me have the freedom to decide, whether it is doing evaluations or setting up a schedule or setting up classes. And then it is a loop, where the principal tries to keep you informed and you try to keep them informed.

Maxine deeply valued the relationship as having an influence on how she was able to perform her job: “Having a good, comfortable relationship is wonderful. When I was moved to the new school, we have become . . . we said we were, ‘Soul mates of education.’ Our philosophies are similar enough where we have really meshed.”

Like Maxine, Mary had worked with three different principals. However, they each had different ideas about leadership, and their different ideas affected Mary’s role: “I think different people have different ideas about [leadership], and I understood [their] ways. I understood it [laughs]. It is hard working with different personalities, but you can.” Mary described the differences in each of the three principals, but discussed her current situation in more detail. She felt valued by her principal, enjoyed the relationship they had established, and felt the staff viewed their relationship positively, too.

I think it is good for [us] to be a team. I think that is why this school works well. My attitude is that I am his team player. In this school everybody sees us like a team. Some people say it is like a married couple because we will go back and forth. I just see the team collaborative effort.

Her current principal allowed her the autonomy to alter instructional factors to meet the needs of their school population. “If the principal goes to a [system-wide] meeting and hears, ‘You will

do this.' He comes back and you think, well, that just doesn't fit." With her large ELL [English Limited Learners] population, many instructional things had to be altered to meet their needs.

Her principal agreed.

Due to Mary's extensive background—"I had been in the classroom teaching third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. I taught literature. I taught English, language arts, all of it. I taught math. I taught science"—she had a depth of instruction and curriculum knowledge. Her principal had not been afforded the same opportunities because of his high school background. Although Mary saw herself clearly as an instructional leader, she shared this role with her principal and did all she could to ensure the entire faculty saw the two of them sharing this role as well. She felt the entire administrative team had to be viewed as instructional leaders.

And I will say, I can't make up for what he doesn't do in that respect. No matter what the assistant principal does, the principal has to show that he [is concerned]. It can't be, "Well, you are in charge of instruction. It is just yours." He has to be involved; otherwise they know I don't have a lot of control over what happens to them if they don't do what they are supposed to do. If he doesn't take an interest in it, then no matter what I say, it doesn't matter, no matter how strong a person I am or connected with them or whatever.

Around the time of this study, Mary had had to confront the principal about a concern related to being in the classrooms, because she felt it was negatively impacting the staff:

I went to him, and I said, "You have just got to do this. You are telling them they have to do this, this, and this. You are telling me I have to do this, and part of the design is you are supposed to be in the classroom. If you are not there, then that says to them that either a) you don't care or b) you don't have to do what you are supposed to do, but they do."

Elizabeth said there was no doubt that the relationship within the administration had been a major influence on several school-related issues. She felt that if the principal did not communicate effectively, it would have a major impact throughout the building.

I think that you have to very clearly delineate responsibility so that everybody knows what they are expected to do. We have two assistant principals here. We have three; one of them is terminally ill and will not be back. We were assigned a third assistant principal last year, and it is still a little foggy here. I know what my job has always been, but the

communication is not there in the triangle so that everybody knows that you are expected to do this. You do this, and I will do this. We just fly by the seat of our pants sometimes.

That uncertainty was frustrating to Elizabeth. The strain that it had inflicted on her had caused her instructional role to be less defined. She explained what had recently changed at her school:

The person we were assigned prefers the instruction to the discipline side of things, so we are playing a little bit of, “I don’t want to do this. I want to do that.” So if we had a stronger person in the principal position who could sit down and say, “This is your job. Take it or leave it. You are fitting in with us, we are not fitting in with you.” I don’t mind handling discipline if we are having a bad day and there are forty discipline referrals. I think everybody knows they need to fit in. I just don’t think you can walk into a building and say, “I will do this, and I will do this, but I won’t do that.” That is where the leadership seems to have broken down a little bit. We are having that issue.

She went further to state, “The [principal] that we have now is interested in making people happy, and that is so permissive to what we had before. With a building this size, you can’t be very permissive, or you just totally lose control of what is going on.”

A situation had recently occurred at Elizabeth’s school that caused her to feel less like an instructional leader. She explained what had happened during the preplanning week:

In a lot of ways, the principals feel like they are going to get blamed for anything that is going wrong and they need to have their fingers in every single pie. But they need to do it in a way that is not going to cut you off at the knees. If it has always been your job to share test scores with the teachers, then it needs to continue to be your job. You can’t take it this year and not take it next year. It has to be delineated that this is my area. I think there is nothing worse than feeling, “Wow, it didn’t matter if I was here today.” Nobody wants to feel that way. That is where the communication comes in. [The principal might say,] “I want to talk to teachers about test scores. I still want you to share them and all the information you usually share, but I want them to understand this about the test scores.” This year we didn’t make AYP because of our special education population. I think she wanted to let the teachers know, “We are going to have a lot of questions about this. Parents are going to be very critical of this. They are going to want to know at registration. I don’t want any finger pointing, ‘It is their fault [special education students] that we didn’t make it.’” She wanted to communicate that. I think she could have communicated that without taking the whole function. Because it was like, okay, I just spent a week and a half getting all of these things ready, and I don’t need it now. You don’t want to feel like you have wasted time. None of us have enough time on earth, and there are things we would rather be doing than spinning our wheels.

Elizabeth had clearly thought a lot about the principal's influence on the instructional leadership role: "Your principal has a lot to do with whether you are kept in a menial position or whether you are allowed to exercise any leadership." She went on to say that sometimes "you have principals who treat you like a glorified secretary. It depends on the personality. The personality of the person above you has so much to do with how you are allowed to interact with people."

Vicki felt her principal had given her the authority she needed to carry out her instructional leadership duties successfully: "She basically gives me the liberty to get my job done. She does not question me." Vicki knew the relationship she had with her principal had enabled her to be an instructional leader even though they had their differences. She explained, "We don't see eye to eye on everything, but I feel comfortable expressing when I don't agree with her. We can agree to disagree." The two of them worked together when it came to decision making:

She is very supportive. She enables me to structure my day as I see fit, and if there is something that we have to tackle together, she is always there for me. If I have to meet with a parent, we try to meet together so we are both informed of the situation. If a parent calls me, I say to [the principal], "This is what is going on. We need to meet" so that we appear to the parents [to be] a strong team.

Vicki understood that the principal/assistant principal relationship is not always this supportive, but she was thankful that her principal valued her as an instructional leader.

Participating assistant principals valued cooperation with principals as having a large influence on how they viewed and could do their job as instructional leaders. The interviews revealed a wide range of experiences. Although not all situations were positive, most were fortunate enough to find a balance that worked for their particular school. Others had even enjoyed finding their "soul mate in education." One idea is clear from the perspectives of the

participants; the principal controlled the amount and type of instructional leadership they were able to provide.

Category 3: Local, State, and Federal Mandates

All participants asserted that mandates influenced their instructional leadership practice. These mandates stemmed from federal, state, or local guidelines, laws, and policies and were seen by all participants as either enhancing or hindering their role as instructional leaders. Participants felt the need to be knowledgeable about those mandates and to be a communicator of mandates to other staff members. Often, participating assistant principals saw these mandates as stealing time from them and adding pressures to the job. The mandates had contributed to assistant principals feeling like managers rather than instructional leaders. They were often barriers to doing their ultimate job: improving instruction and academic achievement.

Mia maintained her positive attitude about all of the mandated policies and procedures constantly thrown her way. She felt it was important to be knowledgeable of laws and policies. She stated, “In terms of being an instructional leader, it is to really have that bird’s-eye view of what trends are in curriculum and nationally and what is coming down the pike from the statehouse and all of that kind of stuff.” But Mia also stressed that mandates were not preventing her from providing the best education possible to the children in her school. She had recently had to adapt to putting her master schedule on the computer so that the state could monitor class size and make funding available to her school. She clarified that

it is just the management of getting things done and reporting to the appropriate people whatever it is that they need to know, and that is kind of how I looked at the master schedule. The state needed to know what we were doing, and so it takes as long as it takes because it has got to be done.

Mia was creative in her promotion of what was best for students while adhering to mandates. For example, there were many programs initiated by the county that interfered with a state mandate

to be an America's Choice school. She had been able to obtain permission to be flexible, but it took time:

For one thing, the vision was so large that it already encompassed a lot of those things. It was a different package, a different name, but you could really say that you were really doing those things that were Best Practices within what we were doing as America's Choice.

District mandates were not the only mandates imposed on schools. Mia had been able to be flexible with those, but she still had to follow the law. She explained,

We were out of compliance for Title VI, class size reduction. My personal target is under 20. The research is with us if we are under 20 in the primary grades. That is my benchmark, and we were at that. We had one class that had 14, and the other classes had 17 or 18 or something like that. Well, Title VI doesn't like that. They want everyone to have the same number of students across the board. So they called us and said, "You have to even out your classes." And I said, "You surely don't mean here in January (or November or whenever it was) that I am supposed to take these children out of their homeroom situations where they are to spread them out?" Oh yes, that is what they wanted us to do. So that is what we did on the computer, but we did not move the children.

Lori, like Mia, understood the importance of mandates but did not want them to hinder her in providing her students with the best education possible. She saw this task as important to her instructional leadership role, stating that part of her job was

being able to take national, state, local—and when I say local, I mean district and school—based initiatives and merge all of those things together to ensure that students are getting a sound education. We are building a foundation at the elementary-school level. And a great predictor of [students'] success is based on what we do here.

Lori was concerned about the immediacy of mandates: "We get an e-mail every other second it seems like, and we have to act on it immediately. It doesn't matter if you are working on something else. When you get an e-mail from the county office, you do it then." The fact that there had been more of them every year added to her concern:

We have AYP, AMO, any three-letter acronym that they could think of came at us last year. We had back-to-back testing. We had CRCT, ITBS, Spring Break, trying to close school. It was just a lot of pressure for me last year. And I told my principal that even my

first year, even when I was learning the position, was much easier than last year. And this is because of initiatives that were just not necessarily mandated by the county, but by federal and state guidelines.

Lori found it difficult to “buy into” the mandates that were so general when every school was so different. It bothered her that

Mandates are generalized to the entire population. What may be good for one school may not be good for another school. But, yet still [laughs] we tell our teachers, “Individualize instruction based on the students’ needs.” But I don’t think often at the county, state, or national level that is done. It is the cookie-cutter mold.

She saw the mandates as a barrier to her instructional leadership role:

The things that inhibit my job are beyond the locus of control of the school. I find that the district mandates which come from state and national levels are most inhibiting. Yet they want to see progress, and they want to see achievement, and they want to see children succeeding, but sometimes the things they ask us to do are not in the best interests of the children.

Brad felt the mandates negatively affected his ability to be an instructional leader. He questioned the motivation of some of the decision makers and said that when it came to school budgets, the schools had to be smarter about program spending:

Children are as different as adults. There are different ways to teach them, so if there is a different mandate about something or if they are trying to spend money for a new adoption rather than give you money that you used to have for this over here, then you are going to have to make that up somewhere. It is a lot of being clever about spending money and making sure that your kids are getting what they need while you are following all the rules. . . . If you know for a fact that your children are low in reading, but the current thing is math or science, and the legislature or whoever picks a science or technology background, there are ways we can build it in—to reading and math obviously, and we will support our program—but you have to get clever sometimes to make sure you are documenting what they want while you are still doing what is the focus of our school, which is reading and math.

Patti referred to local, state, and federal mandates on several occasions. Not only did she recognize her duty to follow those laws and policies, but she also knew her role as communicator of those laws and policies. She stated, “I feel that being an instructional leader is making sure that teachers, parents, and the community are knowledgeable of what is expected of them by the

state and the federal government.” She also felt the weight of the mandates as barriers to her instructional leadership job, giving assistant principals limited decision-making power:

And of course there are always some constraints on the school system, what we can and cannot do. Although site-based management is supposed to be prevalent in the schools, there are limitations to site-based management. Staffing is an issue. We just don’t have enough staff because of points and because of budget constraints with the state and in the county.

Patti had witnessed education change and found it difficult to find the time to perform all the tasks demanded of her position:

With the testing, now that it is so prevalent in the state, assistant principals must become data managers or managers of data and interpret data, and that is another job in itself. We spend much of our time interpreting, analyzing, and implementing from the data we receive from all of this testing. Your school must be data-driven. You must plan the needs of the children around the testing. That in itself is a job. And as I see it, it is a responsibility that should be shared with others, not necessarily the principals. . . . A position needs to be created for that. Because assistant principals, especially in elementary schools, don’t have secretaries, . . . assistant principals’ hours are very, very long.

Maxine had witnessed an evolution in her role as instructional leader and was not pleased with the direction it was headed. When asked what she felt instructional leadership included, she said,

Staying abreast about so much that is going on right now. It has changed in needing to know what the legislature is planning because that impacts us immediately with testing. Testing has become such a key element of all schools, and it drives the curriculum and what we are doing.

Her experience had helped her become cautious when hearing about new programs. Over the years, she had seen different cycles come and go and explained,

The old saying of not throwing out the baby with the bath water—if you have found something that works fairly well, always be open and tweak it and use all the new things. But often, they will come through and say we are supposed to do [something new], but pretty quickly after that, they will find out that [the new thing] isn’t really good. If you have not jumped too quickly one way or the other, you can continually move toward a goal of educating all children.

Although she was able to try to work new programs and policies into existing programs at her school, Maxine still felt frustrated by the mandates: “I feel like we have become more of a data-input person, which is really [not] what I got into this job for, which was helping teachers and helping children and being on top of all of the instructional things.” It seemed to have affected her motivation: “This past year I have felt less satisfied with what I was able to do because so much time was spent on [data input].”

Mary had also felt the impact of mandates on her ability to be an instructional leader in her building. She spoke of testing, America’s Choice, and the wealth of paperwork waiting for assistant principals. She saw some aspects as important but other parts as barriers to her job as instructional leader: mainly paperwork and computer scheduling. Mary said, “The routine of the things that are expected of assistant principals at the county level are more paperwork and are just serving somebody’s purpose of having their job because they need this report turned into them.” She gave the examples of math test scores and scheduling: “I understand why it has to be done and I like doing it, but it still keeps me from doing other things.”

Her school had slowly come to embrace the America’s Choice model forced on them by the state board of education four years earlier: “It has made me think differently about how I do things.” She mentioned both a positive influence and a negative influence. In searching for a positive example, she explained,

We used to give tests but did not put as much emphasis on the results of them except for individual use. I never thought about them driving what we do as a school. Now, of course, the state and federal government has made us think differently about that as well. There is a big part of America’s Choice that is planning for results and looking where classes are, grades are, schools are, how that is going to drive what you do. And so that is a different way of thinking about things. I think I was always a team with the principal, and I always consulted teachers, but never in such a formal way. We make sure we do it every week. I did it every week, but I didn’t necessarily sit down with a whole group of people to collaborate, and that is a different way. . . . It was more of the management of the school instead of the instructional running of the school.

Mary felt America's Choice had helped her student population, which was largely limited in English proficiency. She did not, however, feel as if that had always been the case because of the way it was initially presented as a mandate. She stated, "I think that caused it not to work in a lot of places. Here we go with attitude again, 'If the county is making me do this, I am going to' We heard a lot of this at our leadership training." She attributed her school's success with this particular mandate to a positive attitude: "I think that is why our school has done well with America's Choice, because [the principal's] attitude and mine was, well, we got chosen, and we were told we had to do this, and because of that, we are going to do a great job at this."

About mandates handed down from the county office, her philosophy was different. Mary worked hard to alter the rules to fit her students and teachers. She explained, "Sometimes we don't, with a blind eye, just go along doing it because somebody told us to do it. But we don't try to close the door and do [whatever we want to do] behind either. We decide what fits into where we are going and that is what we do." She respected the fact that every school was different and it was not feasible to use a "one size fits all" approach to educating children.

When asked what instructional leadership meant to her, Elizabeth quickly replied, "I feel like a filter." She then explained,

There are so many things with *No Child Left Behind* and the state requirements for testing and what we need to tell the parents about these tests, what these tests mean. At the system level, I get a lot of information, and I have to sift through it and decide what is going to impact the teachers and . . . what you need to do with this information.

Elizabeth then had a unique perspective of how the two roles, implementer of mandates and supporter of teachers, were in conflict with one another:

I have tried to break it down for them because I am task oriented. I feel if they almost have a checklist of what they need to do with information and how they need to handle things, then they are more comfortable. I think they are. Nobody said, "I don't understand." So I feel like the job is to filter. Also, I know that the system is expecting

this from our school, and so I have to look at it from the other way, too. I am a guard dog and a filter depending on whose end I am coming from.

Elizabeth continued talking about the influence that the current mandates had on how she was doing her job and how she used to do it:

I feel I looked for different things than I look for now. I looked for creativity, time on task, to make sure the lesson plans were addressing the ITBS objectives. Now I am looking for compliance. Do we have time to check for creativity as well as complying with the law? We have to teach the QCC's [Quality Core Curriculum Standards]. We have to be on this pacing calendar; you have to be at the right place on the pacing calendar. I think the teachers feel like we have taken so much out of their hands that they don't have as much discretion as they used to.

Elizabeth explained that one of the main problems with mandates was that they came from so many different directions:

We don't seem to have one organization that provides recommendations to teachers about what it is they should be doing. We get it from so many different directions. We get it from within the system and from the state and from the federal government. Then you have the NEA and National Standards, State Standards, other organizations. It is a lot of information to pick from and say, "Okay. This is what we need to be doing."

Vicki spoke often of how the pressure from other authorities influenced her work with curriculum and instruction and how difficult it was to manage. She was disappointed in the amount of time she had to spend in front of a computer screen due to laws and policies:

I think initially why I became an assistant principal was because I really wanted to be able to foster change and see teachers in their classrooms teaching and observe that, give them feedback, and guide them with staff development and provide staff development opportunities that would be beneficial to them. Unfortunately, that is not our role at all. We are behind the computer inputting data, e-mailing constantly about different things—which I know is part of our job. But I feel so much of it, 75% of our job now, is that. A lot of time is spent just making sure that what we are doing in this building is documented correctly to the state, unfortunately.

Later she commented, "The nature of the job now and being tied behind the desk so much of the time, I feel like that is a barrier to being successful with making changes with the instructional program."

Vicki blamed the current lack of communication on the people outside the building who were creating the mandates:

I think part of it is the administration that is in control right now as well as the state demands right now. I think there are things that could be done easier if the county—I don't know if it is the lack of communication or no communication, . . . but there are certain things that we have to do that are ludicrous.

She gave an example of having to do a lot of paperwork that was unnecessary:

We are constantly re-creating different things to make [the information] fit for whoever wants it, when there is no need to do that. Who really needs that? Who even looks at it? They ask us to do a lot of paperwork that never gets looked at. Things are asked of us at the last minute.

All nine of the participants perceived mandated policies and laws as a barrier to what they were trying to achieve as instructional leaders in their schools. These demands created a role conflict within each of them.

Category 4: Management Duties

The title *administrator* translates to *manager* for many individuals in the schools. Whether they like it or not, assistant principals often have to take on roles within their jobs that push them in a direction opposite to instructional leadership. Six out of the nine participants thought that managerial tasks such as maintenance of the master schedule on-line, discipline, custodial staff, cafeteria staff, lunch/breakfast/ arrival/dismissal duties, excessive paperwork, test scores, and PTA responsibilities inhibited them as instructional leaders. Although they acknowledged that these tasks are important, assistant principals participating in this study frequently saw themselves as “data processors.”

Mia was surprised at how many “opportunities” arose that removed her from her focus on instruction and curriculum. It was difficult for her to take time to complete her managerial tasks when she did not value them. She explained how she viewed them at length:

It is hard sometimes to sit in front of the computer and do the master schedule for weeks and days on end or be the test coordinator, the things that are a part of the job. Sometimes it is hard to make a connection to those kinds of things, but I try hard to in my mind. I try hard to communicate that with other people, the things that I am doing and how I believe they will impact student achievement. There are times when I get frustrated because it takes too long, like the master schedule. Certainly the master schedule impacts students' learning and thus their achievement, but the time that it took to input that into the computer—I am not too sure that the input would equal the output in terms of student achievement. But as you know, there is a part of running a school that has nothing to do with students, actually. It is just the management of getting things done and reporting to the appropriate people whatever it is they need to know.

Mia had been able to remove herself from some of her managerial tasks due to who she was as a leader. From the time she stepped into the position, she had maintained that she would not become an “office assistant principal.” She had been able to refrain from management duties because of her principal and those around her who recognized her abilities as an instructional leader.

Brad's opinion was that assistant principals are the “workhorses” in schools. He often had to step up to “run the building” when the principal was called out of the school for various meetings. He had to be the manager of various school details. Brad said,

We are here most of the time to make sure that everything runs smoothly. You get everything that goes wrong, like sewer gas. We had sewer gas in the downstairs restroom because the trap had dried out. Dogs, I have chased dogs. You get kids that are sick. You get kids who are disrupting their class. You get everything, and you are just supposed to know how to do it. I am supposed to know where everything is in the building. If [the principal] wants to know where the toothpicks are, I am supposed to know where they are.

Like Brad, Patti clearly felt the crunch of the managerial part of her job, which included many different tasks. She viewed them as barriers to her role as instructional leader:

There are a lot of responsibilities. You have to maintain or assist in helping maintain the building. Of course, instruction is first and foremost, discipline, just managerial types of things, custodial, cafeteria staff members, support staff, parents, parent involvement, PTA, all of that, of course, and the counseling. You wear all of these hats.

Patti thought the management aspects of her job demanded extremely long work days: “The paperwork and the managing of your instructional program is basically done after school.” She went on to say,

With this testing, now that it is so prevalent in the state, assistant principals must become data managers or managers of data and interpret data, and that is another job in itself. We spend much of our time interpreting, analyzing, and implementing from the data we receive from all of this testing. Your school must be data-driven. Planning the needs of the children around the testing: that in itself is a job. As I see it, it is a responsibility that should be shared with others, not necessarily the principals. . . . A position needs to be created for this. Because assistant principals, especially in elementary schools don't have secretaries, . . . assistant principals' hours are very, very long.

Due to the fact that Mary had worked with three different principals and according to various ideas of instructional leadership, she had seen the number of her management responsibilities change through the years. Mary shared that she spent about 60% of the school day on curriculum and instruction. The remainder of the time was used for management-type duties. She explained, “Things come up that have nothing to do with instruction that I have to do, like write a report. I guess the schedule impacts instruction, but putting it on the computer [for the state] does not.” Mary said the overwhelming load of paperwork made it difficult to step outside of her office.

Mary viewed the time spent in the classrooms working with teachers and students as important to instruction; however, she was never able to be in the rooms as much as she would have liked:

Everyday, I walk in and I think, well I am going to be in the classroom so many hours today. I walk in, and these last-minute things that you did not know about have to be dealt with. “Did you see your e-mail? We are supposed to be in a meeting at 1:00 today.” Well, I thought I was going in Ms. Pitt's room today, so I never made it there. I think it is important to be in the rooms, and I notice when I go in that there is a difference, and I don't do it enough.

Routine tasks that are a part of the assistant principal's job were viewed as barriers to Mary:

The routine of the things that are expected of assistant principals at the county level outside this building that are more paperwork [are barriers]. They are just serving somebody's purpose of having their job because they need this report turned into them, like pre- and post-test scores for math and the scheduling. I understand why it has to be done on the computer, and I like doing it, but it still keeps me from doing other things. If we have "Family Night," I have to make sure that things are run off and copied. Some of it is just plain old management stuff I have to do. . . We don't have somebody to do inventory. I do that.

When possible, she tried to delegate some responsibilities not directly related to instruction to other staff members in her building. She explained,

I used to do all the stamping of the books. Now the secretary or the custodians do it. A lot of those mundane kind of things I have tried to give up so that I can devote more of that time to instructional things. The equipment inventory, I hand that straight to the computer tech person. She knows where all that stuff is in the building. I am not about those things that are not instructional.

Elizabeth found management duties to be the most pressing at the beginning of a new school year. There were an abundance of details she had to take care of that took her away from the heart of instruction. When talking about the time spent on instruction, she said, "At the beginning of the year, I would say not enough because it is spent on housekeeping and the master schedule, the lunch schedule, the seating chart for the cafeteria." She went further to say,

I have not spent enough time on curriculum so far. We are in our second week with children. Maybe that is something I just wish I could get to right now, especially with 17 new teachers in the building. You have to make sure they all understand what QCC's are and make sure they have copies. I wish I had more time to go over that before anybody gets too far along in the lines and has to change everything that they are doing.

Vicki said that a difficult part of her job were the "custodial duties" that required so much of her time. She offered a solution: "I think if it were a perfect world, we could actually have someone like they do at the middle- and high-school level putting in schedules and data entry and things like that. They just don't provide us with that at the elementary level." In addition to the paperwork and computer tasks, she also had "lunch duty, carpool duty in the mornings, and bus duty."

Assistant principals in this study perceived themselves as being so caught up in the “custodial duties” associated with management that they were inhibited as instructional leaders. The time necessary to complete these non-instructional tasks was time taken away from students, teachers, and instruction.

Category 5: Faculty and Staff

Other members within the school organization can impact how instructional assistant principals view their role and how they are able to operate in that role. School variables can also affect this perspective. For example, a few participants mentioned additional staff members who would take over some of the management tasks, which freed them to focus on instruction. However, the amount of extra staffing is determined by a school’s student enrollment, special programs, or other related components. As a result, not all assistant principals are afforded the luxury of having that assistance.

Mia is one assistant principal who strongly valued those staff members in her building. She explained,

Fortunately, we have enough people in the building to be able to do [administrative tasks]; for example, we have two secretaries and a clerk. There is an assistant principal for discipline. There are two counselors. My day-to-day stuff is much rooted in just instructional kinds of things.

She recognized that her school had so many support staff members because her school was an America’s Choice school. She was also quick to note that without these individuals, she would have been faced with an impossible task:

I don’t know how to say this, but I think in this building, . . . having the support in terms of people, . . . having an assistant principal for discipline, having a clerk, freed me up to do [other] things. I don’t kid myself for one minute. If I did not have those [people], I could not do it. I just flat out could not do it.

Lori felt the crunch of the position and what it entailed and, unlike Mia, did not have adequate support staff at her school. One thing that she thought could help her perform her instructional duties would be a second assistant principal. Because of the size of her school, she was the only assistant principal:

I think that when schools have two assistant principals in the building, an API [assistant principal for instruction] and an APD [assistant principal for discipline], not that the load is less, but I think you are pulled in less directions. With me, being the only assistant principal in the building, I feel like I have more responsibility than someone whose . . . responsibility is distinctly identified by their position title. I do it all. I have been known to pick up a cloth and clean the table when a custodian is out, sweep the floor, or whatever, because we have to make sure that our school runs.

Brad shared his instructional leadership role with a second assistant principal. They had divided the duties between the two of them, and he valued her assistance with the daily responsibilities. But he was concerned that often he did not know how to do the tasks he was assigned:

In many ways, it is good because we split the stuff. It is not just one person getting stretched so thin that they are not effective. It is a lot. The only time I can think of it as not being a positive is . . . I worry sometimes that something is going to come up that I am not going to know how to do.

There was only one assistant principal at Patti's school. As a result, she wore many hats and made the statement on a few occasions that "assistant principals do everything." Patti would have liked to see a position created to help with the demands. She felt this extra help was necessary now that testing had become so prevalent in the state and the stakes were so high:

Your school must be data driven, and we must plan the needs of the children around the testing. That in itself is a job. I see it as a responsibility that should be shared with others. . . . A position needs to be created for that. Because assistant principals, especially in elementary schools, don't have secretaries, . . . assistant principals' hours are very, very long.

Maxine felt that faculty members facilitated her job as an instructional leader. She had had to learn this with experience and laughed while she explained,

When you first start out, you feel like you know everything, but at this point I feel like I don't know anything. . . . but I know where to ask. You can't do it by yourself. I work the same amount of hours as I used to, but in different ways. Being able to call on faculty members to help and assist with certain things is very helpful.

Mary viewed the school staff as a team, and she relied on certain key players to help her with her instructional leadership. One such person was her technology specialist. She appreciated her assistance with scheduling at the beginning of the year and said, "I sit down with our computer tech person who has a great mind for seeing a schedule. I will say, 'This and this and this is what we need,' and she will help me do it." Mary also valued the main office secretaries: "They are very good about helping." She delegated responsibilities such as stamping books and making copies to others.

Elizabeth included teachers among those who had assisted her. She explained,

There are some teachers who you can ask to do anything and they will say, "Sure." Nothing is too much for them. And then there are teachers, and they have a very strong sense of, "This is what I am paid to do, and this is what I am going to do." So if there is anything creative that you want to try in the building, you just know by visiting that this is not the person to try that with.

The other assistant principal at Elizabeth's school influenced her ability to do instructional leadership. She detailed an ongoing problem:

This person visits classrooms and provides feedback to the teachers that is contrary to what I am being told at meetings and to what my principal says she wants to see happening or what the system wants to see happening. I will get some teacher feedback, "I don't understand. . . . You told us to do this, and I got a note saying that I need to change the way I am doing something. I don't know what to do." It is trickling down, and there is a lot uncertainty.

The other assistant principal with whom she worked had her own agenda. This conflict was a problem because the jobs had not been clearly delineated. Elizabeth explained, "If you have two people who are working for the benefit of the school, egos don't collide. But if you have

someone in place purely as a stepping-stone, who is very political, that is where you run into problems.”

Vicki had the unusual circumstance of several of her teachers seeking leadership certification. They desired to learn about the position; therefore, she saw them as very helpful to her role. She talked about one teacher among her strong staff of teachers:

The staff here is so on top of things that it affords me the opportunity to be an instructional leader, and that does make my job easier. I have a first-grade teacher pursuing her leadership degree who came to me when she started here and said, “Anything I can help you with . . . I want to get more training and more knowledge about what your role entails.” She actually co-chaired the SACS report with me. She will drop anything and do it for me. She is also our volunteer tutor program coordinator. She has taken that over for me.

Vicki also attributed her ability to create the schedule on the state program to her gifted teacher.

This task, “which is put as a priority because it indirectly helps with instruction by giving us the number of personnel that we need,” is something that had to be done creatively:

The only reason I have a handle on this is because of my Discovery [gifted] teacher. She loves doing it. She said she could do it 24/7. What we do is, she sits right here with me. I am at the computer, and she is the brain of the operation, and I am going, “Okay, what do I need to do?” Thank goodness I have her.

These responses indicate that the influences of other faculty and staff members can impact an assistant principal’s instructional leadership. Most of the nine assistant principals in this study were afforded the assistance of staff to help them with clerical tasks; as a result, they were empowered to spend more time on instructional leadership. However, as in Elizabeth’s situation, when duties were not clearly allocated between two assistant principals, conflict occurred, making the demands of instructional leadership more difficult to meet.

Category 6: Personal Motivation

Assistant principals seem to motivate themselves intrinsically. They are driven by the challenge and desire to help students learn by helping teachers teach. They also see part of their

job as motivating others. Clearly, the research participants thought it was important to motivate teachers. The participants would sometimes subtly describe their internal influences as motivation.

Mia had a passion for education that she exuded during the interview. She was motivated by helping children. She talked about the time she first arrived at her school.

That is one of the things that I liked about this school is that there was definitely a need when I came. It was do or die. And that was pretty much communicated, that you are the assistant principal for instruction. We are going to be in major trouble if at the end of the year, things are not looking better. And I liked that. I liked the challenge of here is what we have to do. Let's get in there and do it. It made everybody ready.

Mia was clear about what she thought about leadership and education. She had brought personal feelings and experiences to her position and the job, which she felt she had been sent to do. She held back tears as she explained,

I really believe in the power of what a school can be and what teaching and all of that can do for children. . . . I think that the combination of what I have been trained to do and the passion that school can make a difference even with kids who don't have parents who are all the time there. We can make a difference, and that is a passion that I bring.

Lori spoke of her desire to make a difference that influenced her as an instructional leader. She described herself as very methodical and very organized and said, "It is about the kids. It is strictly about the kids." She also said she was goal oriented:

I am very strong willed, and I don't succumb to pressure. So for me, nothing stops me once I have my eye on the prize. I am kind of like a bulldozer, gung-ho. That is the best way to describe me. I am full speed ahead. This is where I am going. I will let you know this is where I am going. If you try to stand in my way, you will get plowed over.

Lori described her own intrinsic motivation as the "bottom line": "Knowing that I am doing what I have been sent here to do, I have to do it to the best of my ability. I am supposed to be a good servant in my job. Why am I supposed to be a good servant on my job? Because that is the religious belief I have."

Brad considered himself a “motivational leader.” He commented about when he first considered entering the administrative field. He described his own motivation by saying,

When the big push about accountability [began] and we were hearing all of that. And I thought, “Well, if I am going to be held accountable for everything they say we are going to held accountable for, then I think I may need to look at new roles and maybe getting in a better place where I can make a difference.” We had a very open-minded principal here who would listen, and I felt like maybe I needed to start looking for other ways to make my opinion known and what role I wanted to have.

Brad thought his motivation had helped him become successful in his position:

You have to be very motivated. You have to be very independent. If the principal is going to have to follow you around to make sure you are doing what you are supposed to be doing, then he is not going to have time to do the other things that he has got to do. So I think you have to be dependable, self-motivated, and make sure you are doing whatever your assignments are.

Brad said that a part of that motivation was preplanning: “just making sure you get everything done so that the instruction is at the level where it needs to be.” Brad saw preplanning as an indispensable responsibility in his position. “I think for the instruction to be at the level it is at, you have to make sure that all of the stuff ahead of time is done.”

Karen’s motivation came from her desire to help teachers help students. She said on several occasions, “I think the hardest job in the building is being in the classroom.” Karen faced a difficult year due to the lack of support and trust from her principal. However, her motivation did not diminish. She continued being an advocate for teachers because she felt she could best help students that way. Karen knew that the way she had been treated by her principal was “not a reflection of my ability.”

Like Karen, Patti was confident in her motivation: “Making sure that students are achieving, that we are giving the students the best learning that they could possibly get anywhere in this world. . . . I guess that is why many of us spend so many of our waking hours in the school.” She went further to state, “The students and the need to achieve motivates me and

facilitates me, . . . and then the teachers, they are hungry for strategies, and so it forces me to go out and make sure I know what is available for them.”

Although Maxine missed the “Instructional Lead Teacher” emphasis that her job had initially, she still held onto the aspects of the assistant principalship that were most like the title that had brought her to the position. She defined those factors as “Commitment, dedication, open mind, quest for always wanting to learn, liking people, and enjoying children.” Maxine felt that the stress of the job had made the motivation more challenging as her experience in the position increased. She said, “There is so much. And they have continually added to the position and have not taken anything away.” She declared,

I feel like we have become more of a data-input person, which is really more than what I got into this job for, which was helping teachers and helping children and being on top of all of the instructional things. This past year, I guess I have felt less satisfied with what I was able to do because so much time was spent on [data input].

However, Maxine did not allow the change to influence her motivation. She maintained that it was simply another challenge.

Mary’s positive attitude helped her stay motivated. Commenting on the America’s Choice mandate, she explained,

I think that is why our school has done well with America’s Choice is because [the principal’s] attitude and mine was, well, we got chosen, and we were told we had to do this, and because of that, we are going to do a great job at this. Otherwise, why be here if we are not going to have a positive attitude? We are going to be miserable if we don’t.

Mary felt that the motivation she exhibited spilled over into the motivation her teachers had and said that if she had not been doing what she was supposed to be doing, then teachers would not have either. She said, “Whether it is America’s Choice or anything, . . . I think the school has to see that everyone works as a unit and everybody is doing their part.”

Mary had watched the population of her school change, but not the school's focus: "Over a six-year period we went from being 23% Hispanic, to 42% Hispanic, to 50% Hispanic, to 60% Hispanic, to 80% Hispanic. Over those six years, we have gotten more and more bilingual, but we still have made the progress." The fact that her school had made AYP throughout its transition motivated her. She went further to explain the motivating power of information she received from various stakeholders:

I know from feedback from children and parents and teachers. . . . And most of that is informal, . . . but I think that some of it is formal in the questionnaires we have had to send home about instruction for SACS. A lot of it is just seeing parents show up at family nights and talking about what is happening in their child's classrooms. And hearing teachers talk about the progress their kids are making and how good they feel about it.

Personal motivation was a product of Elizabeth's upbringing. She had high expectations for herself and others and explained that most of these expectations had come from her father:

My motivation is that I want to be the best at what I do. I don't want to do enough to just get by. I want it to be good quality and something I would be proud to accidentally find five years from now and say, "Wow, that was good." Not, "Goodness, I can't believe I let that go out and it looked like that." I have my standards about how I want things to be.

For Vicki, changing things for the better was one thing that motivated her in her position. She was also motivated by what her faculty said about her. She talked about a conversation she had recently had with one of her teachers:

Oftentimes, . . . we do team-building things at faculty meetings to give people positive strokes. A couple of times, people have identified me as a motivator or a good listener or somebody who is an inspiration. I don't see myself in that role. I just see myself as doing my job and doing it to the best of my ability. Other people see that in me. This one particular teacher said, "I am just amazed at all you do and you are so organized. You are an inspiration." I just do it.

All nine participants mentioned the importance of motivation in fulfilling their role as instructional leaders. They viewed their own personal motivation as a contribution. Also, they

all felt teachers were more apt to accept a new program or policy if they themselves acted as motivational leaders in their daily behavior and interactions with teachers.

The extent to which an assistant principal can perform instructional leadership is often determined by others. Assistant principals in this study spoke of these influences as barriers to or facilitators of their main role as instructional leaders: to ensure that students are learning. They were motivated to navigate around existing obstacles and ward off frustration in order to maintain their priorities.

Theme 2: Assistant Principals' Actions as Instructional Leaders

Although the participants' jobs encompassed a variety of activities and responsibilities that sometimes incidentally contradicted each other and could change on a daily basis, all of the assistant principals stated that the number one aspect of their role as instructional leaders was to ensure that students were learning. They measured this achievement not only by state mandated tests but also by daily interactions with teachers and students. Assistant principals often have a deep-rooted idea of how to maintain a strong instructional program and are willing to go to great lengths to keep those programs strong. The assistant principals in this study discussed the actions they took in performing their instructional leadership role.

Category 7: Monitoring

Assistant principals are given the task of monitoring the instructional program on several different levels. They are charged with knowing what is happening in their buildings at all times; they read lesson plans and visit teachers to make sure they are carrying out those plans while following district and state standards. Although the term *monitoring* can have negative connotations, the participants did not simply “watch over” the teachers in their building; rather, they provided “help” where needed by being visible in the building and in the classroom. All

nine participants discussed visitation as a priority, and several assistant principals thought that monitoring was a method for offering positive recognition to teachers.

Mia was extremely involved in the daily business of teaching children. She felt she was not threatening. She explained, “I want to be able to say that I am blocking this amount of time to be in classrooms. I want to work with new teachers. I really want to look at lesson plans very carefully and give people feedback about their lesson plans.” She went further by saying,

Instruction is the most important thing that we have to do on a daily basis, and I was going to communicate that by being present in the classroom to see what was going on, to validate the things that were going on that were good, and just to get some idea of things that are not going well and how to begin to address them.

During her second interview, Mia again stressed the importance of being visible in the classroom, being knowledgeable of what was occurring in the classrooms, and interacting in dialogue with teachers. Mia explained in detail what monitoring and visibility meant to her.

For me professionally, it makes me really put instruction at the center of my day. If 9:00 comes and I am not in the classroom, I feel like I am not where I need to be. For me, it keeps me focused on teaching and learning, and I think that is what school is all about. It makes the teachers know that I am aware of what is going on in the classroom. It keeps the dialogue going. It still keeps it focused on teaching and learning, but it keeps the dialogue going about what is going on in the classroom, about students that are having a difficult time, teaching strategies that I saw a teacher use, or great teaching strategies that I saw a colleague use that might be useful to them. It helps keep an ongoing conversation about how do we best teach and how do we best help our students learn. And that hour is helpful that way.

It also helps me to know the children and see how they are coming and responding to a new curriculum. . . . It just helps me to know when you make a good curriculum decision, when you get good materials in, and know whether that is something to continue. We have bought other things, and I never see anyone use them. We keep buying math manipulatives, and I still do not see people using them. Then it makes me feel, is it a training issue? Do we need to start talking about it? Do we have just so much stuff that people don't know how to use it appropriately? Is it a management issue? It just makes me think, if everything is in place and it still is not happening, what do we need to do to back it, to make it happen? It helps me keep my feet on the ground in terms of talking about teaching and learning and making it an ongoing conversation, and also in terms of curriculum issues, it helps me to get a feel school-wide about what are the practices we

are doing and what materials do we need and what additional training do we need to get to the next level.

She added, “Being in the classroom gives me the opportunity to really talk about the benefits of things and how things are going and patting [teachers] on the back when they are taking a risk.”

Mia valued her time spent in the classroom, time that the principal did not spend, and felt it gave her the knowledge to make instructional decisions.

It begins with being visible in the classroom. And that is the norm I think that [the principals] are not as visible. What it does is it makes me sort of . . . I don’t want to say isolated, . . . but I have a sense of . . . I have a feel for the school that she doesn’t have, even though there are decisions that she has to make. For example, [FTE] points, you have got to get rid of teachers or you have got to get rid of programs or whatever. I don’t feel like she has the sense on the ground level how those decisions will impact the day-to-day program because she doesn’t really know in a concrete way who are her really good teachers and what their strengths are and that kind of thing.

Laurie said that monitoring was the basis for what she did as an instructional leader due to the information it provided:

The most consistent way I monitor instruction are lesson plans and going into classrooms. Not just official visits, but walk-throughs. A lot of times when we have conferences, parents will come to me before they go to the teachers. Because I know what is going on in those classrooms, I can honestly speak about the teachers’ abilities and what is actually going on. You are able to sound like you really know. I couldn’t tell you what was going on in the kindergarten classroom if I didn’t go in there to see what was going on, or if I didn’t monitor lesson plans, because that documentation is very important, and it is becoming even more important with the new accountability procedures. The reason why we are here is to educate children. If we are not making sure teachers are doing what they are supposed to be doing, there is no guarantee that students are going to get what we want them to understand and master by the end of school year.

Brad had a different idea of being visible although he also felt the “crunch” of spending time in the classroom as much as he thought was necessary. He equated direct instruction with teaching:

As far as what I can do with direct instruction, obviously, [is] limited. We try to get in the classrooms as much as possible. I do reading with a grade level, and I had third grade last year and read to them once a week. So you know you try to get those direct instruction moments in as you can.

He added, “The things that I think that I was able to do this year as far as direct instruction were those mini-groups [third grade flexible groups] and reading to third grade every Monday. But very few times was I able to just pop in a class and help a teacher out.” Brad was not able to be in classrooms very often but valued many other duties that contributed to a strong instructional program: “I don’t think that the work I do today is less important because I don’t see the kids directly, because if you didn’t schedule events properly, the teacher would have to eat up her time doing it.” Brad viewed himself as helping behind the scenes. He was not always visible in the classroom while children were being taught. Rather, he attended grade-level meetings each week: “I try to meet with them to make sure they are all on the same page. That is sort of direct instruction, one step removed, meeting with them and making sure they have their lesson plans.” Brad learned about monitoring from his principal. He explained what had happened to him the previous year:

That was one little hard lesson that I had to learn. I gave somebody something to do, and they did not meet the deadline. I gave them their deadline. You know, their deadline was a week before I had to send it in. Why do I have to follow this person around? I asked them to do this, and they are a professional. My principal said, “Well, what gets monitored, gets done.” I was like, I will keep that in mind, but I don’t think that I should have to follow an adult around and make sure that they are doing what they are being asked to do.

When she first entered administration, Patti had been afraid she would be disconnected from the classroom, but she had found herself still involved in daily classroom activities. She was an active participant with the teachers by being a Design Coach:

We are also an America’s Choice school, which causes the assistant principal to be a Design Coach. And that Design Coach responsibility is to make sure that the roll-out of the program, the design of best practices, is rolled out correctly throughout the school. We meet weekly. We do focus walks. The focus walks entail making sure that the teachers are implementing the design like it should be implemented. We go on focus walks at other schools. There is just a tremendous amount of work checking artifacts in the classroom.

Patti was visible and monitored what was taking place in her building no matter what time constraints she had to overcome. She explained that one of the most important aspects of her job was to ensure that learning was taking place:

Making sure that the best practices that you have put into place or that you think that you have mastered yourself and have put into place, that those best practices have been rolled out into the classrooms. We, as assistant principals, spend most of our days in the classrooms. Much of our paperwork has to be done after school. We spend, I would say, three to four hours a day in the classroom. . . . The paperwork and the managing of your instructional program is basically done after school. Making sure that students are achieving, that we are giving the students the best learning that they could possibly get anywhere in this world . . . I guess that is why many of us spend so many of our waking hours in the school.

When asked about the importance of visiting the classrooms, she replied, “That is priority. That takes priority over everything else.” Patti took what she had learned about her school’s instructional program from being visible and used it to help children:

We are in the classrooms most of the day. We have to be so that teachers are implementing the strategies that they need to be implementing so that we can increase student achievement. . . . We monitor student progress on a weekly basis. There are level 1 plans that must be made for our remedial students. We not only write these plans, these instructional plans for level 1 students, we make sure that every teacher writes a plan for every student in this building. Those plans have to be checked and monitored.

Patti said the America’s Choice model had helped her to value her time with the teachers. She was in the classrooms, but she also used what she saw while visiting to talk with the teachers later about instruction, about what was working and what was not. Together they determined the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional program.

The design team and I would assess ourselves on these impact checks of what are we doing best and where are our weaknesses and what do we still need to do. And we can tell by being in those classrooms and asking the students and asking the teachers, “What performance standard are you working on? Have you conferenced with the student? Let me see your notebook.” And that is why the students are there. And then we will turn to the students and say, “How do you know your work is good enough? How do you know—for example, paragraph organization—that this is a great paragraph?” And the answer to that is when it meets the performance standard, and the performance standards

are always posted. So we have to make sure they are posted. And we can't make sure they are posted if we are not in the classrooms. And of course teachers' performance standards change often, and we have to be there to make sure all of that is happening.

Karen saw being in the classrooms as a priority when she first became an assistant principal. She knew not only the importance of being visible but also the reality of possessing a job that did not always afford her the opportunity to be in the classrooms. She said, "It is hard to get into classrooms. I always swore when I was a classroom teacher, when I moved on, that I was going to be in those classrooms. I was really going to go in those classrooms." She felt this way because of a memory of an experience she had when she was a classroom teacher:

The first principal I ever had, who I didn't really care for too much, . . . we got to the end of the year, we did our last formal meeting that we had, and she told me what she felt about me as a classroom teacher. I knew that she knew what she was talking about because she was in those classrooms. She was walking through my classroom every other day. By the same token, some principals who I absolutely adored, and knew that they liked me, but when they said, "You are a wonderful classroom teacher." I wanted to say, "How do you know?" And I have said, "How do you know?" And they would say, "I know because kids talk about you and parents talk about you." "Yeah, but how do you really know?" Because [my former principals] didn't get in our classrooms. So I feel like it is so important to get into those classrooms so that you can reinforce what teachers are doing.

Like Karen, Maxine felt the constraints of the job impacting her ability to leave her office. She made a conscientious effort to be visible and available to her teachers, responsibilities that were very important to her. She offered the following example: "The paperwork and the new computer things that have been added, I try to do and not take away from being visible and being in the classrooms as much as possible." Maxine explained that it was beneficial to teacher instruction for her to get in the classrooms:

I don't get in as much as I want to. When I do get in, I think, "Oh, I need to be in more." It gives you such a hands-on pulse. You can think things are going great, or you can think there is a problem. When you get in there and see how the person is doing it, you may have some suggestions, or it gives you a better insight into a person who is going through SST [Student Support Team] or new teachers providing support for them. New teachers coming in—wow, I feel like that has become so much more of our responsibility. When I

came in, we were just thrown in the classroom. But now there is so much between the legal things and privacy, technology, being a mentor for all new faculty members is a very important part of instruction and setting those expectations and what you want or what really is the basis for your curriculum and everything.

Mary was required to conduct focus walks in her school. She explained, “I have to schedule focus walks to look at things we are concerned about.” These walks helped her remain aware of what was happening instructionally. She felt that if she had not been visible and did not “look at what [was] happening,” then “Best Practices” were not going to be upheld. She had a deep root in curriculum and instruction due to her vast teaching background. She explained why this background helped her: “When you go in, you know what you are looking for.” For Mary, not only was visibility important, but actually knowing curriculum guided her instructional leadership.

One way that Elizabeth largely impacted instruction was to conduct the walk-through observations. She explained,

It is just a five-minute visit. You are looking for content, cognitive level. You are trying to see if the teacher has challenging things on her wall, future learning opportunities, . . . that she is trying to do some higher order thinking activities with the students.

Unfortunately, with all of the demands of the job, she was not afforded many opportunities to observe in this way: “Some mornings I have to just come in and grab my pad. I ignore whatever is on my desk, don’t look at the e-mail, don’t care if the message light is flashing, just go do it. If you sit down and get involved in anything, you . . . will never get in the classroom.”

Vicki felt that her monitoring role gave her a more complete picture of the instruction being done in each classroom. It also helped her answer questions posed by parents:

It gives me the knowledge of someone who is aware of what is going on in the building. I can say I observed that firsthand and can give examples of things that relate to whatever the concern is. I can tell you that I have had umpteen experiences dealing with that same thing. And because I was and had been in the classroom, not this year but other years, it

saved a lot of headaches, . . . being able to talk to the parents truthfully about what is going on.

Vicki also said that it helped the teachers:

I think it does really hold the teachers accountable. If they know that you are going to walk in that room and see objectives on the board, time on task, those things we are looking for in a walk-through, they are constantly going to be on their toes. They can put on a dog-and-pony show; you can catch them off guard if you are doing that continuously.

Vicki went on to say,

Everyday I am going in their classrooms and observing good teaching and giving them feedback, either positive, or talking to them about ways they can improve their instruction, . . . calling teachers in face to face and point blank asking them why they would do something the way they did if it is something that I saw that didn't look quite right or make sense.

The other way Vicki monitored was to look at lesson plans. She said she read all of her teachers' lesson plans via electronic mail every Monday morning. She made sure that everyone was correctly pacing in the different subject areas.

Participating assistant principals' perceptions of their monitoring role was important to ensuring that instruction was appropriately delivered. They reviewed lesson plans and lessons taught by their teachers as often as their schedules and demands permitted. Time spent in the classrooms contributed to the "helping" role of the assistant principals in this study. In addition, visitation afforded them a view of the total instructional program.

Category 8: Commitment

There was overwhelming consistency in the responses regarding commitment to the job. The typical elementary assistant principal knows that to do the job, more than a 40-hour, five-day work week is required. Assistant principals are committed to doing a good job for teachers and students. They do whatever is required to ensure that students are learning and teachers are teaching best practices. They put in many extra hours (50+ hours per week) to ensure that the

building is conducive to learning and that their students succeed. Seven of the nine participants had been working through the summer even though they were technically “off the clock.” When their principals asked, “Can you?” they replied, “What time do you need me?” They had a “do whatever is necessary” attitude and took responsibility.

Curriculum and instruction were two things to which Mia was committed. She was explicit about what she would and would not do: “I was real clear that if it is not based on instruction, if it was not working with teachers or students, . . . we will have to figure out who else can do it. I am not doing it.” She went further to say, “As assistant principal for instruction, what are the things that only I can do? And those are the things that I am going to do, and everything else I am going to figure out how do we get around it.”

Mia had always felt her time in the classrooms with the teachers and students was extremely important. Even though it was difficult, she said, “I am committed to be in the classroom at least one hour every day come rain or come shine.” One way in which she did so was to block from 9:00 to 10:00 every day as her “classroom time.” She assured parents and staff members that she would not compromise that time. She was proud of the rewards that came from her commitment:

I am really proud of the fact that my school was on the list of needs improvement, and we are a Title I distinguished school since the four years I have been here. So that makes me feel like there were some things that were already in place that were good, but I like to think that some of the things that I did made a difference and kept that momentum going throughout the whole process. That is exciting, and there are a lot of things that are going on, and the children are certainly the beneficiaries of that and the community.

She truly believed in what she was doing: “I bring personal passion and drive into it. And I was just taught that there are certain things that you need to do to make sure that things go well.”

Commitment to Lori was imperative because of the importance of the assistant principalship. She saw herself as a “liaison for teachers, students, parents, and the principal” and

said she had to be there for all stakeholders. She explained why she was so committed to doing whatever was best for children:

I will say 100% of my day is spent directly on curriculum and instruction, and this is why. If the children are hungry, they are not going to learn, so I have cafeteria duty. I have to make sure they eat. I am up monitoring, up circulating. If the children have a dirty restroom, they don't want to go in the restroom. If they are bouncing around in their class, they are not learning. So I work with my principal to make sure the restrooms, the facilities, are clean. If the children are outside at recess and they fall and have an injury, they are missing instruction while they are in the clinic. I have to help her call the parents. If a child is being disruptive in the classroom, he or she can't learn, nor can the teachers teach, nor can other students learn. So I have to make sure I intervene and put strategies into place so that the learning can occur even though that child may be having a personal problem. I have to make sure the children get home safely. So I actually ride a bus to make sure the children get home safely because if they get injured, they can't come to school, which means that they are not learning. So, 100% of my day is indirectly or directly dealing with instruction.

Brad had a similar philosophy to Lori's and discussed his commitment to helping the total child. He explained why everyone in his building had to do whatever was necessary to help his or her students:

If a kid is hungry or scared or sad, they are not going to be as receptive to math. Math is not really all that important to you if you have been beaten at home. If you don't take care of the whole child, then I think the instruction is going to suffer. I do think it is a good part. The pre-kindergarten child who has cried for three weeks is obviously not getting the same experience as the kid who came in happy as a lark and waved at mom at the door and went down the hall. They can't possibly be having the same experience. So the one that is crying needs to be taken care of so that he or she can catch up. I do think that the whole child is a big deal.

Brad extended his commitment beyond the regular school day. He had spent his Saturday, two days before the interview, painting the parking lot along with several teachers, students, and parents.

Patti knew that getting into the classrooms takes priority over everything; as a result, her commitment extended beyond the instructional day:

I meet with my custodial staff, the cafeteria staff, before and after school. Let me explain how my day goes. I am normally here between 6:30 and 7:00. That is when I make sure

that the lights are on, there are not power failures, that the cafeteria, that the breakfast is ready. We start serving. . . . My first bus comes in at about 7:10-7:15. . . . Breakfast has to be ready. We start serving at 7:15. After greeting the students and making sure that all buses are in, I head to cafeteria duty. Just this past year, I have had enough staff members to do bus duty, so I report directly to the cafeteria. In this particular school, we feed 400 and something students every morning, and I am with them. Instruction begins at exactly 8:00. Between 8:00 and 8:45, I am meeting with parents and addressing any concerns they may have. At 9:00, I am in the classrooms. I am in classrooms from 9:00 until 11:30. Around that time is when I normally see . . . [or] address any discipline problems. And then at 12:30, I am in the cafeteria. If I have not seen some teachers within that week, at 1:00 I am in the classroom. Normally from 2:00 until 2:30, I am addressing those inappropriate behaviors. The children leave at 2:30. And then at 3:00, if it is not a grade-level or a leadership meeting where we plan and implement our strategies for our teachers and our students, then I am calling parents. At 4:00 is when I start any reports or look at other information. I leave at 6:30, or 7:00 at night, and that is everyday. During the summer—I am a 10-month employee—I work, but I am not on anybody’s payroll.

When talking about herself as an instructional leader, Patti went further to say,

I take responsibility for all that happens in this school although all of that responsibility is not mine. I take that responsibility, and I take ownership for that responsibility. And if, for instance, my test scores don’t look like they should or in my weekly monitoring I don’t see progress, I feel I have failed as a leader to make sure that something was implemented effectively. And I know I can’t do it all. I can’t solve everybody’s problems, but I try.

Maxine gave her time during the instructional day to the faculty and staff, making herself available to help them. She said, “The detail work that I have to do is done after hours.” She went on to say, “It is not an eight-hour day, and it is not a five-day week. I go in most Sundays and work.” Maxine was committed to remaining an assistant principal, even though she had been approached on several occasions to consider the principalship. She valued the role that the assistant principal had on instruction and had decided to remain in that capacity for students and teachers.

Elizabeth’s commitment was strong. It started with the amount of time she devoted to the job, but did not end there. She mentioned what had been happening at her school: “I know I work at least 10 hours a day. I was here on Saturday for a PTA function. We are going to have Open

House every night this week and Monday and Tuesday of next week.” She spoke of her commitment as a matter of fact, without any tone that might suggest complaint.

Elizabeth was also committed to continuing to learn about new instructional updates. She said one of the ways she knew she was an instructional leader was by her commitment to professional development: “I am still interested in reading what makes things work and looking for new ways to do things. When you just keep doing what you have always done, you lose your edge and you burn out.”

Vicki attributed her commitment as an assistant principal to her attitude toward hard work:

I think we are overachievers. I know I get here and do my job. I don’t have any down time. Once I get here, I am on it 24/7. . . .I structure my time so I am constantly doing something. I don’t ever just kick my feet up or sit and have coffee. I get here and I do my job. Most days, I work nine hours. I came in this summer, too. When I am here, I am all about work.

Commitment was discussed by seven of the nine participants as a key component of instructional leadership. Commitment was defined as the time given to the job as well as a “do whatever it takes” approach. They demonstrated commitment to students and teachers as well as to the position.

Category 9: Sharing Knowledge

Assistant principals have to be knowledgeable so that they can help teachers help students. They are often seen as the experts in the field of education, but feel that this title must be earned through demonstration. To develop this knowledge, they must stay up to date with the most current educational research and use their own teaching experience as a knowledge base. All nine participants had experience as a classroom teacher at the elementary school level. They were life-long learners who had earned advanced degrees. Two were in a doctorate program.

Mia felt that to be an instructional leader, one must, “have that birds-eye view of what trends are in curriculum and nationally, and what is coming down the pike from the state.” She said that her teachers would often say that she had more knowledge about instruction than her principal, even saying, “You are like our principal.” She attributed this view to the fact that she was in the classroom more often than the principal at the school.

Mia also saw herself as a lifelong learner: “I feel that I have the tools and the knowledge and that I know what needs to be done. I read a lot. I read a lot about good schools. I read a lot about instructional leadership and what needs to be done.” She could not imagine not learning and improving: “I bring my best self to the school. I have a knowledge set that gets better and better all the time in terms of practices and things that need to be done.”

Lori said, “In terms of instructional leadership, first of all, I have to be knowledgeable. I have to know what practices are best for our types of children.” Her staff had told her that she was knowledgeable. Lori said that this impression resulted from her being in graduate school, learning about the latest research in education, and sharing that information with her staff. She said, “I tell them about it, and I try new initiatives; they swear I am so creative, and I just repeat what I heard in class the previous night. But I think going back to search for knowledge myself, . . . knowing that I am not perfect, . . . I am fallible [helps people see me in a good light].” Lori liked that her staff saw her this way. It had given her credibility with her teachers that was helpful in doing her job.

Karen found out immediately upon stepping into the assistant principal role that those around her expected her to know everything. She was surprised at what had happened at her school:

I was a classroom teacher for two years. I moved down the hall and sat behind this desk, and all of a sudden I was supposed to have the answers. These teachers I had been

questioning with, the next day they came to me and wanted the answers. And I would think, . . . I will find out. I don't know the answer, but I will find out for you. And I spent a lot of time on that. I got so tickled at that. I just wanted to say, "I didn't know it yesterday. How come today, I am supposed to know the answer?" I had to maintain the professionalism of my office and say, not "How come you think I have the answer?" but "I will find out for you." Or give them, "I think it might be this, but lets work together and see if we can find out." Some of the things I could answer, obviously, but some of them I couldn't.

Although her staff members saw her as having a broad knowledge base, she thought it was important that they worked together to find out answers to instructional questions:

My background is in science, so that is covered easily. If anyone has science questions, they come to me. But as far as reading and other areas, language arts, any of that kind of [subject], . . . it is a little more. . . . We work through these things together. I don't have a specific program that I say, "Okay. Let me instruct you on how to do this."

She did not want teachers to feel as if she knew it all. Several times, she called the teachers the experts.

Maxine said that the change that had occurred in the assistant principal position over the years had caused her to feel as if she were less knowledgeable about programs and initiatives.

She described what had happened:

When we started out, [assistant principals] were the only ones ever trained on any of the programs, whether it was the computer or the academics. We came back, and we were the pipelines of knowledge from the county. That was the way it was set up. We were pulled from our schools quite often for every new program that came in. We came back loaded with books and every manual and every procedure. Now it has become a train-the-trainer type of model, . . . involving the teachers and having the teachers learn most of the new programs and come back and do the training. . . . I think as instructional leaders, we are kind of left out of the loop in the real nitty-gritty. [The teachers] get some of the training, but we don't get all of that. But they don't get the training on how to apply it to the whole school. They just get what [the program] is. So sometimes it is a little bit harder trying to put it together. But it was also very, very hard being the fount of all knowledge. Now . . . I know who I can contact to find the answer.

She missed the training opportunities that had enabled her to be knowledgeable. They had been a chance for her to "network" with other assistant principals and share ideas. However, she said with all of the items required from the state government with regard to education, it would have

been difficult to attend all of the training and share the information with the staff, even though that was what she loved about her “Instructional Lead Teacher” role when she started in school leadership.

Mary’s experiences in the classroom and as assistant principal had given her knowledge and credibility to perform her job. Her experience spanned several areas and helped her know what to look for when she entered a classroom: “A lot of that stuff I already knew because I had been in the classroom teaching third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grade. I taught literature. I taught English, language arts, all of it. I taught math. I taught science.” Mary viewed instructional leadership as truly leading with teachers, the aspect of her job that she enjoyed. She explained how she envisioned it as

not only just keeping the school running as far as instruction. But it means knowing what is out there that is good to use in the classroom, that might be new and different, and making sure that teachers know about it and get trained on it if it is something they think will work. It means keeping your eyes and ears open, not just in your building, but in the county and in the state, as far as general information, whether you find it online, or you just hear by word of mouth, or you take a class yourself. It means keeping up with what is going on. And that is what I think I like and what has kept me in the job and still liking it. It is never the same.

Demonstrating her knowledge was how Elizabeth demonstrated credibility. She described a particular time when she caught a teacher by surprise:

I went in and read a story to a second-grade class, and I was trying to lead them to the meaning of the word “memory.” We talked about, “What is it?” . . . We went through this whole thing until we got to, “Remembery.” Which I thought was a really neat word for this child to make up. The teacher came to me later and said, “You know you were so good at the higher order thinking. It just made me want to do things differently.” It was nice for me. It was very positive feedback to me that . . . you know, you do what comes naturally to you. You just don’t think, “Oh, this is a higher level, or this is a recall.” You just do what is natural for you. . . . I think they like to watch you to see if you are any better at this than they are, [perhaps thinking,] “What is it that got you to where you are?”

That day was “memorable” to Elizabeth because she was able to demonstrate best teaching practices.

Vicki felt she had become knowledgeable to remain in her position, something she took very seriously. This “indirect” way of instructing included knowing what was available in terms of instruction. About instructional leadership she said,

You are knowledgeable on anything having to do with instruction. Not that you are necessarily the expert, but that you can seek the information and the resources and the information needed to support the teachers and students. Whether that be offering a workshop or contacting someone from the county about a certain aspect of curriculum, anything that deals with instruction. I think that we spend a large part of our day being the instructional leader, but it has been in an indirect way.

Vicki was a life-long learner who had always been interested in acquiring new information. The parents of her students valued that knowledge as well. She explained,

Going to school as long as I did and reading all we had to read to build that foundation for being a strong leader, I definitely think you have to be very knowledgeable. I think in a community like this, I would not be able to fake it. [The parents] would catch on real quickly if I tried to fake it. They will call us on it.

Assistant principals in this study felt they had to be a knowledge base for the teachers in their building. They continuously read and kept up with current research on effective teaching. Their teachers expected them to be the primary knowledge bases for instructional savvy. They valued and enjoyed this role as an instructional leader because it added to their credibility.

Category 10: Providing Resources

Assistant principals see, as one of their main tasks, providing teachers with the appropriate resources to teach children. Although that resource is usually knowledge, often the resource is a set of tools for giving their students quality instruction. Most of the assistant principals in this study were in charge of professional development at their local school.

Lori felt that her teachers would come to her when they needed some ideas for new strategies to reach their students:

A lot of times, teachers will come when they are at their wit’s end and say, “I can’t reach this child. Do you have any suggestions?” And I have to be able to pull something out of

my hat or my wealth of resources and say, try this. They will stop me in the hall, “This is not working.” Try this. And I have to be a resource myself when they don’t want to research on the Internet or look in their old textbooks or whatever. But to me, instructional leadership means being able to be a resource for people who need help with instruction.

Lori worked with her school’s budget to provide resources for her teachers. She consulted with the teachers to identify instructional materials to use in the classroom.

I order textbooks. If they don’t have books, they can’t learn. Ordering supplementary materials, I work with a budget. I am specifically responsible for the 4-8 after-school budget. This year I did something different. I put in an after-school program that had not been done before. I included some of the funds for Title I so that all students would have an opportunity to come.

Brad liked being able to provide his teachers with the resources they needed to teach effectively. His principal had given him the task of spending program money on resources for teachers. He commented, “I make sure they have everything they need. I try to listen to what they want. I keep a running list of everything they want to have so when money comes available they can have something that they might not be able to have otherwise.”

Karen commented that she did not have “a specific role that is well defined, but rather a generalist kind of role where I am here to help you in whatever areas are needed.” Providing resources was one of those areas. Whether she was ordering textbooks, gathering materials, or inviting guest speakers, Karen was there for her staff. Her attitude was that “teachers need all the help they can get.” Karen felt that her flexible schedule, although it did not provide her with enough time, enabled her to provide resources for her teachers. The principal with whom Karen had been working at the time of the first interview was no longer at her school at the time of the second interview. Karen saw herself as a resource for the incoming principal because she was new to her school and the system. Karen’s experience in the school and her position gave her the chance to be a resource.

Patti saw herself as a resource for teachers and parents. She shared that one way she exercised instructional leadership was through “staff development. We always want to enhance our teachers’ professional development. Therefore, one of the responsibilities of assistant principals is that you give your staff, whether it is the certified staff or the support staff, professional development.” She went further to state,

I make sure they have all the curriculum materials, the resources. I make sure that we find money for professional development as well, to try to enhance competence so that all children succeed and we have “No Child Left Behind.” Whatever the needs of the teachers are, I make sure that I provide those things for them. And if I don’t have the answers I am willing to go as far as the superintendent’s office, which I have done before for them.

Patti also talked about providing resources to parents:

We are making sure the parents are knowledgeable of the content that is expected of their children. We have to make sure that we are training parents as well as training teachers and other staff members in those areas that we need to be. Parents need to know and must be aware of the performance standards that are expected of their children.

Funds that filtered into Mary’s school from various sources allowed her to provide resources for her teachers. Mary explained,

I have been working on spending the money that is given to us by our “Partner in Education.” We focus any expenditure on instruction based on where we want to go. It may be staff development materials, books. . . . We have started doing literacy study groups. So not just the books the county wants us to buy, but we have bought things through America’s Choice and what they have recommended.

Mary also shared her involvement with professional development, saying that she worked closely with her staff development liaison to be a resource herself.

Elizabeth saw her role as a resource for the teachers and the parents. She felt that being a resource should be a part of her job: “I think if they need something or want something, they will come and ask me, and they know if I don’t know, I will say, ‘Let me call around and see what I can do.’” Elizabeth did not have control over the budget. She had to seek approval from her

principal to purchase materials: “I don’t have a budget. All I can do is make recommendations.” She would locate articles of interest and share them “in a group discussion kind of way.” She also said, “I give them things they need for the curriculum, but then I try to give them things that will help them grow professionally.” In addition to providing for teachers, she was also a resource for parents. She offered them various tools to help them. She had recently ordered free publications from the United States Department of Labor website on how parents can help their children with reading and math. She worked hard to obtain a book for each of her parents.

Vicki described her role as a resource in two ways:

I think not only am I a resource for [teachers] to come to me and talk with me about situations, either discipline or instruction, when they are not sure what to do, or get some feedback. But [I am] also a resource for any instructional materials that they need and for making sure that they feel comfortable teaching in the role that they are in. If not, if they want to do something different to improve themselves, I make sure we provide them with staff development opportunities.

She also expressed an appreciation for her active PTA members who provided her with a large budget to supplement the programs at her school:

We are fortunate because with our PTA, as much as they are in our face about things, they are also very supportive when it comes to providing funds for different things. They provide me with an instructional budget. I am able to supplement a lot of materials for my teachers. They also provide us with staff development funds.

Seven of the participants discussed being a resource as an important component of job as instructional leader. Being a resource was one of the roles that assistant principals in this study felt obligated to fulfill. Resources were in the form of materials, professional development, and knowledge of instructional practices.

Assistant principals in this study knew the importance of their ultimate goal: to ensure student learning. They viewed this task as a mission and would do what was necessary. They consistently performed four specific actions as instructional leaders: monitoring, being

committed, sharing knowledge, and providing necessary resources. These actions positively influenced the outcomes of their instructional leadership role.

Theme 3: Desired Outcomes of Instructional Leadership

Two perspectives of school climate emerged from the data. School climate was important in determining how effective an assistant principal considered him or herself to be, and the participants felt that a large part of their job was to maintain that positive learning culture throughout the building. Particular behaviors they exhibited contributed to the positive atmosphere: collaboration, support, trust, and accessibility. All the participants felt their schools' particular climate began with the principal and filtered down. Mia saw "marginal" or "poor" teachers' contracts renewed every year and felt this oversight negatively affected hard-working, premier teachers. Even though she was a part of the leadership team, she had limited control over the situation. The leadership team was thus unable to impact the overall school climate in an entirely positive way.

Category 11: Collaboration

Collaboration was mentioned as a key component of instructional leadership by eight of the participants. They placed this component at the top of the list of important outcomes and repeatedly offered examples of their collaboration. This collaboration was practiced with all school stakeholders.

Working at an America's Choice school enabled Mia to stress the importance of collaborating with the entire staff to evaluate good instruction and improve school efforts. She said a majority of her job was working with a team within her building to maximize learning. Although she felt she provided leadership in this area, she valued the team that worked together. She explained the time she devoted to collaboration:

I will say on Thursday, I spend all day in teacher meetings talking about curriculum, assessment, . . . all day every Thursday with different grade levels coming in. I probably spend a lot of time on that now that I am thinking about that. And then the day before, I meet with the coaches, and we talk about what we need to talk about on Thursday, and that is a teaching and learning kind of conversation. Even when I am talking to parents, that is what I am talking to them about.

Mia's school had instructional "coaches" who worked with her and the teachers. She commented on them further:

I would really say that they work under my direction. They would say that, and I think of that as well. We always talk, we always meet, we end that meeting with, "You are going to see this person this week, and I will follow up on this person; and I am going to sit down and talk with this person because they need a little administrative support. The coaching is not moving them along." So we always leave with a game plan. We work as a team certainly.

She felt that collaboration was necessary. Mia talked individually and in small groups to help people understand the philosophy of America's Choice.

Lori viewed her collaborative efforts as extending beyond the classroom. She also felt that the faculty saw this team spirit and that it contributed to an overall positive school climate: "I have been known to pick up a cloth and clean the table when a custodian is out, sweep the floor, or whatever, because we have to make sure that our school runs." One specific thing she mentioned that she had tried to do the past year was work with the special education department, a department that she felt had often been forgotten:

I really reached out to special education because it is probably the area I know less about. I told them I expected them to be my teacher, to help me to understand their program and help me be their advocate. They felt things were not just for their students, and I told them that I would not allow us in this building to neglect them. . . . I think they appreciate that, my willingness to work with them. . . . And I was willing to work with them, and that "Together We Make a Difference" theme really sets the sounding board, you know; that was my principal's vision for last year. And it really established what we were going to do as a community, and when I say *community*, I mean school community. It really worked for us.

Lori had a clear idea of the effect her job had on the entire school program. She explained the domino effect that occurred if she was not on top of everything in the building.

If the children are hungry, they are not going to learn, so I have cafeteria duty. I have to make sure they eat. I am up monitoring and circulating. If the children have a dirty restroom, they don't want to go in the restroom. If they are bouncing around in their class, they are not learning. So I work with my principal to make sure the restrooms, the facilities, are clean. If the children are outside at recess and they fall and have an injury, they are missing instruction while they are in the clinic. So something I have to do is help her call the parents. If a child is being disruptive in the classroom, he or she can't learn, nor can the teachers teach, nor can other students learn. So I have to make sure I intervene and put strategies into place so that the learning can occur even though that child may be having a personal problem. The buses in the afternoon—I have to make sure the children get home safely. So I actually ride a bus to make sure the children get home safely.

In addition to collaborating with the teachers, principal, students, and staff, she also worked with the parents when necessary: “I talk to parents, whether it is about discipline or about something else. Sometimes parents want to unload. They need somebody to talk to. They share some things with me. Well, if that is going to help their child, and help them to help their child, then I will do that.”

Like Lori, Patti valued the collaboration that occurred with the parents because it positively affected students. Although she did not enjoy the discipline part of her job, she did see how it helped:

The first year that I was an administrator, I did most of the discipline, which was not that gratifying. But I had a positive impact on the children and the parents, and that was gratifying because I was probably one of two people in the building to see most of our parents, and therefore I increased parent involvement, and that was good. So in doing the discipline aspect of it, I got to see more parents.

In addition to the discipline connection with parents, she also works with parents on the instructional side: “We are making sure the parents are knowledgeable of the content that is expected of their children, so therefore we have to make sure that we are training parents as well as training teachers and other staff members in those areas.”

Patti collaborated with everyone in the building as a leader. When she was asked what instructional leadership meant to her, she explained,

It means leading your group, your congregation, based on the data you receive, leading them into achieving the goals set for the school, making sure that the best practices that you have put into place or that you think that you have mastered yourself are put into place, . . . that those best practices have been rolled out into the classrooms.

Patti worked directly with the literacy and math coaches: “I meet with the coaches almost daily. Every afternoon they come by, and we will talk about what we have seen. The coaches are in the classroom as well, working with the teachers and the students.” Patti also collaborated with students: “We conference individually with the students to make sure they know what their weaknesses are so those weaknesses on the performance standards can be addressed. Students read to me and read to the principal. We ask them what standard they are working on weekly.”

Karen was serious about her collaboration role. She valued the position of the classroom teacher, and she had not forgotten what that position meant. She said her job was clearly to work with teachers: “If there is a conflict or problem, I am there to help them to work through it together. I don’t feel like I am the ‘Sage on the stage’ by any means, having all the answers, but together, I think we can find the answers.” Although she could not think of a specific incident when she worked with a less-than-adequate teacher, she outlined what her role would have been if she had encountered that circumstance:

When you have a teacher who is not a quality teacher, I think the idea is to visit with them, talk with them, ask them, “How do you handle these kind of . . . ?” Together, work through problems they may have. And again I don’t think it is a matter of sitting there and accusing anyone of anything, and this has to be changed, this kind of behavior; I think it is a collaborative role that I have, that I work together with teachers to help them be the best they can for students.

Karen valued her time spent working with others, including the strategic planning committee, because it had a significant effect on student achievement. Talking about the strategic

planning committee, which worked directly in the classroom, she explained, “The programs set up there are the brainchild or the whatever that ends up being our instructional program in the classroom, works with our SACS plan. It is all intertwined.” Her school’s strategic planning committee consisted of the principal, several teachers, and herself. They were responsible for working together to make decisions that were in the best interests of the children. Karen explained,

Together, we make decisions as to what the direction of the school is going to be. We make decisions together. Whether it is communication, which is reading, writing, speaking, listening, or curriculum, which is all of the areas—human relations, character education, things like that—and the last is enrichment technology. Making decisions that affect what goes on in the classroom, what goes on with children, after school enrichment, as well as all of the programs that we do. So helping teachers in that particular role.

Maxine said her collaborative ideas had come from looking at school issues globally. There was a domino effect that occurred in a school. From her perspective, unless she worked with everyone and considered how decisions would affect every member of the school family, a particular plan would not work. She described a conversation she had recently had with one of her teachers:

I told her one of the biggest things is to try to get the perspective of the whole school. She was thinking about her viewpoint and coming from her grade level and was talking about some things for registration. I said, “Think about how that would impact parents, and impact [everyone else].” . . . That is what you kind of have to do; you have to get the global view of everything. You have to realize that it is a domino effect. If you just do this, if you change one thing, it kind of affects lunch, or the schedule, or something all the way down the line. That is kind of the whole thing, to see the whole picture.

Although it had taken Maxine a while to understand this trickle-down effect, she felt it was a “sixth sense.”

Another concept that had taken experience for her to realize was the way instructional leadership had evolved in Maxine’s district. Assistant principals had gone from being “pipelines

of knowledge” to being “left out of the loop.” The responsibility to collaborate had been forced on them by decision makers at the district level: “Now it has become a train-the-trainer type of model, and you are involving the teachers and having the teachers learn most of the new programs and come back and do the training.”

Maxine enjoyed working with individuals in the building by reading to classes and teaching lessons with teachers. The collaboration role was imperative because effective instruction depended on the cooperation of all school employees. She said, “Assistant principals do everything. We are a right hand to the secretary, to the principal, to the custodian, to everybody. But instruction is the key. You have to look at the whole thing because it all has to work together so that the instruction can work.” She continued by saying, “I feel like we are all a team, and if I tell them, ‘I can’t help you,’ then when I am asking them to join together for our big vision, they will go, ‘Why?’” Maxine enabled that collaboration. She explained how listening to the concerns of others had helped her become an effective instructional leader: “Personally having the openness and the willingness when someone comes in and says, ‘I just really don’t like this.’ I try to work with them to let them know how or why it is supposed to work or being able to tweak it a little bit so they can feel comfortable with it.” She added that this skill had taken time to develop through experience on the job.

Mary spoke at length about school culture and the different conflicts that could act as barriers, one of which was people not working together. She explained how her view of the importance of collaboration contrasted with her principal’s view:

He doesn’t necessarily see personal conflict as a big deal because he doesn’t see personal conflict as an issue. I think it impacts everybody and how they feel about being here. So if they aren’t getting along with somebody, you need to deal with it. Sometimes I just want him to know because I am going to deal with it. I just see the team collaborative effort.

The America's Choice model had influenced Mary's view of the impact collaboration had on school climate and instruction. Her school had a leadership team, consisting of several key players in the school:

[This model] is all about instruction and where we are going from here. It has changed in that more people are involved here. We meet once a week. The role has changed in that more people are involved in what happens here—you know, the literacy coaches, the math specialist, the reading specialist. We have two teachers that meet with us every week. There is a whole lot more collaboration.

Her school's focus had changed in several ways. She talked about those changes, including the involvement of her staff members in the decision-making process:

I was always a team with the principal, and I always consulted teachers, but never in such a formal way. We make sure we do it every week. I did it every week, but I didn't necessarily sit down with a whole group of people to collaborate, and that is a different way. . . . We have a summer brainstorming session that is open to anybody any day. We talked about committees for next year. We talked about the schedule and took out last year's schedule and said we didn't like this, and we had other ideas, and so we put PTA's in and conference nights. So it involved everybody, not just me.

She liked involving everybody and working as a team: "I like hearing everybody's input; there are a lot of different ways of looking at things. I think it does help me do my job instructionally because I listen to people." Mary also added, "We do a school improvement plan every year. I like it because it brings everyone together to look at instruction and to make sure that everything you do ties into your basic goal of where you are going."

Mary felt her collaborative role had impacted instruction tremendously. She talked about several activities that she did throughout the year:

Grade-level meetings with teachers—I do that weekly until we get toward the end of the year, and then things get too busy to do that. I think the staff development we do in the building with the teachers [is important], . . . whether I have directly done it or I make sure it is planned and done. Looking at the data the teachers give me and then discussing it with them. Not necessarily the end-of-the-year data, but yearly as we go along. Looking at developmental reading assessment results, math results, . . . and we look at that every week in this room. The coaches and the literacy and math bring data from whatever is happening in the classroom. And looking at student work and being able to

see what is happening. I get a kid's piece of writing, and I analyze it as if I am the teacher, and then we talk about it. I think looking at student work and talking about it with teachers weekly has made a big impact on how they go back and deal with it in their rooms.

Elizabeth fostered collaboration in order to improve instruction. She encouraged her teachers to observe one another once a week: "One day a week, I want them to see another grade level teach. I think that keeps you fresh. You get ideas, and you may see one teacher teach a skill in a way you think your children would enjoy." She wanted the teachers to use this informal method of peer coaching to generate teaching ideas and dialogue, but she said she would have been satisfied if "they would get out of their room and see somebody else teach a skill, . . . if they find someone who really can do it, [then] go back and talk to them." She also said, "If it just makes them think, I am happy. If it makes them rethink what they do, then I am happy." Elizabeth thought the team concept was an important one in schools and felt that her team worked together: "I think our faculty as a whole, they are a really good group of people, and they really work well together, and they want to be supportive of each other."

Vicki valued collaboration in her school and saw its absence as something that could seriously hurt a school:

I think [collaboration] is paramount. If you work in a school where the administrators don't get along or don't see eye to eye on things, it is a reflection on the whole school and how the school ends up operating, . . . especially in a school like mine where you have a lot of parental involvement. They can tell right away when an administration is not cohesive. I think it trickles down to the teachers, it trickles down to the auxiliary personnel, everyone. It trickles down to what people feel they are accountable for, like showing up for work on time; I think overall they have more respect for you.

Vicki also explained the collaboration that occurred between the administration and the staff and among the faculty members:

We require each of the grade levels to have a weekly grade-level time. They provide me with a schedule. We try to get to some of those meetings periodically. We call in each grade level during their planning time and meet with them and discuss any concerns they

had. We went over test scores. We went over level 1 plans and students who needed to be identified and parents who needed to be contacted for conferences. We collaborate. We hold monthly building leadership team meetings where all the grade chairs meet with us monthly or on an as-needed basis. We have weekly staff meetings. The other times that we collaborate are informally with the open-door policy. We are constantly meeting with teachers informally.

Eight of the participants discussed collaboration as an important part of their instructional leadership role. This “team” concept was a positive outcome of their instructional leadership and, in turn, a positive influence.

Category 12: Support

All participants understood their support role and saw it as crucial to the school climate, which, in turn, affected the instructional program. They understood that by directly supporting teachers, they were indirectly supporting students. A few participants saw their role as assistant principal as less important than the teachers’ role and therefore placed significant weight on the assistance they provided daily. In some instances, the assistant principal acted as a support in teachers’ personal lives as well as in their professional ones.

Mia felt the trust she had established in her building had aided her in the area of support. She tried to foster a climate where teachers felt free to take risks but admitted how challenging that task was for her. She explained part of her supporting role:

That is hard as an instructional leader because it is hard to get people to say, “These are things that we need to do; these are ‘best practices’. Come out of your comfort zone a little bit. It is going to be okay. Let’s just try. Let’s just talk about doing these things. Let’s see what we can do to move ourselves in that direction.”

Mia worked with the America’s Choice “coaches” at her school and used them as another source of support for her teachers. She met with them weekly, and they discussed ways of support.

Speaking of the coaches, she said, “We always talk, we always meet, we end the meeting with, ‘You are going to see this person this week, and I will follow up on this person, and I am going

to sit down and talk with this person because they need a little administrative support. The coaching is not moving them along.” She also explained how the weekly meetings with coaches helped her maintain perspective:

It helps me keep my feet on the ground in terms of talking about teaching and learning and making it an ongoing conversation; and also in terms of curriculum issues, it helps me to get a feel school-wide about what are the practices we are doing and what materials do we need and what additional training do we need to get to the next level.

Support was the foundation of leadership in Lori’s situation. She explained her opinion of the importance of that assistant principal support for everyone in her building:

I believe we are the structure, we are the foundation that supports the school program. We are supporting our teachers, our principal, our students, our parents. And it would be really interesting to see if they pulled all of the assistant principals for a couple of days to see how things would run.

She had recently had the opportunity to see what happened when she was not physically in the building to give that support. She attended a professional conference for three days. She explained that her cellular phone rang continually with questions. Several of her teachers called in desperation, asking, “When are you coming back?”

Lori also said she found herself being a counselor, “providing guidance to teachers and paraprofessionals. I have found myself being a counselor as they pursue their own academic careers in graduate programs,” but she saw the fine line she had to maintain while offering this level of support:

It is important that I have a personal and professional relationship, and I try hard to maintain a fine line, which is hard because I am their supervisor, which does not allow me to be their friend a lot of times. . . . I don’t want my teachers to feel so comfortable with me that they don’t do what they are supposed to do for children.

Support was clearly one of Lori’s goals. She explained its importance:

Parents understand and teachers understand I am here to support them. But there are some things that we have to put into place to make sure that our children get what they need. Our teachers work, they work harder than anyone, I am sure. Any teacher does who

is in education right now because the demands are so great. And to let them know they are supported . . . improves instruction because you have a school climate [that says] I know if I go to my administration, I will be supported. And that affects everything we do.

Brad had offered much of his support to the third-grade students over the past year due to the high stakes testing at that grade level. He explained,

I did reading with third grade last year and read to them once a week. So you know you try to get those direct instruction moments in as you can. The administrative team did a third-grade mini-group, and we each took five students in a mini-group and focused in on what their reading level was.

Brad knew an important part of his role was to support others. He shared, “The big thing for instruction as far as the administrative team’s role is to make sure that the teachers have everything they need and that they are supported.”

Patti focused on professional development as one way to support her staff. She explained, “We always want to enhance our teachers’ professional development. Therefore, one of the responsibilities of assistant principals is that you give your staff, whether it is the certified staff or the support staff, professional development.” Patti also sent her “coaches” into the classrooms to offer support: “Coaches are in the classrooms as well, working with the teachers and the students.”

Karen was quick to point out her role as a supporter of teachers. It had surprised her when she first entered administration that she often heard other administrators speak negatively of teachers. This disparagement continued to bother her because of her deep conviction that her job was subordinate to the job of a classroom teacher. When she first became an assistant principal, she thought, “I saw it as support to teachers, classroom teachers, . . . to help them do what needs to be done in their classrooms. To help them function and help children. That was the role. That was how I saw it.” She would do whatever was necessary to support teachers, and she explained why she continued to feel this way: “I don’t think there is any other job as difficult as being in

the classroom. So I feel like it is important that I support classroom teachers, that I do what I can do to make their jobs easier so that they can do their jobs to help children because that is the bottom line.” Karen defined an instructional leader in the following way: “A person who supports teachers and is there to help teachers do their best in their classrooms. I am here as a facilitator. I am not here to tell teachers how to do it. They are the experts in the classroom. They know their students. They know what they need.”

Maxine’s experience as an instructional leader had afforded her the opportunity to see changes that had occurred over the years. She felt one aspect of her role had changed from teaching teachers to supporting teachers:

In the past, it was more teaching every new program that came through, and now it is being a supporter of that. Helping the teachers who are going to the [training] meetings find the time to do the proper instruction [redelivery] and then give them the backup and let the teachers know that [the new program] is just not coming from these teachers. It is supported by the administration and we are all expected to work on it. With the new reading and math programs, trying to find time for them to meet with teachers is hard. Trying to give everyone support and let them know that you realize that it is one more thing for them to do, but you know you appreciate it. You are there.

A clear philosophy about support that emerged from the interview with Maxine was summed up in the following phrase: “I like to lead by sharing and then doing it along with them. I will go in and help with a group and that type of thing.”

Mary also had experience supporting others. With her large number of multilingual speaking students, she knew what happened to teachers when they did not feel that support:

It was hard work to me, but it is not like teaching these children who come from non-English speaking families with no language before they come to school. You have to work every minute you are here. You are exhausted, and if you don’t have support from the front office and other people seeing how hard you are working in the classroom, then you give up and you quit. You do the minimum.

Mary supported the teachers by being in the trenches with them. She missed the “Instructional Lead Teacher” role that had been in place when she first became an administrator. She explained this change:

I guess I like to be in a helping role more than an administrative role. That is why I didn't like what happened to the ILT as it became assistant principal because I think back to things I did before then. For example, cooperative learning was real big when I first became ILT, and nobody was doing it. I had just gone to take a class, and I really thought, . . . especially as we were becoming more transient, more Hispanic, I thought . . . we really need to be working more cooperatively here. So I got a few teachers on my side, and we started having a course taught here. I was able to do stuff like that. People bought in because they really thought I was trying to help them. Sometimes, they don't think I am trying to help them anymore.

Support was at the top of Elizabeth's priority list. She wanted to give the teachers all of the tools necessary for effective instruction. She said,

My number one goal every day is to see that the teachers have what they need to do what they need to do. I am here to support them. That has always been my thought. Our jobs exist to make the classroom happen. They are not here to serve us. It is the other way around. We have to communicate that to them, and they need to tell us what they need.

Elizabeth talked about what happened with one of her teachers who had failed to submit her lesson plans:

We have a teacher who had not turned in her lesson plans, and I kept giving her notes about her lesson plans. She felt increasingly bad, and I kept asking and finally she went to another teacher who told her, “You just need to go see Elizabeth. She will understand. She won't yell at you.” I think they know that. They will come in here and maybe they have screwed something up, and I will say, “Okay, well, let me see what I can do and we will try to fix this, but don't do it again.” I don't tend to fly off the handle. I am pretty even keel. I think they know that. It is kind of risk free when you come in here. I am not going to yell at you.

Vicki explained that it was important to support teachers when parents were concerned:

“When a parent comes up with a concern, we go directly to the teacher and share the concern with the teacher and investigate. When we are in front of the parent, we support the teacher.”

Vicki said that the support she provided extended into the personal life of the teachers:

That is a major part of our job. Not only instructionally, but if a teacher is feeling down in the dumps or has had a parent who came and fussed at her, [my support] makes her feel like she is worthy of her job and is doing a good job. Even those teachers that are not your favorites, you still have to be supportive of them and find them the resources they need to improve and be very tactful about it.

Support was a recurring theme that emerged from the data. All nine participants saw it as indispensable to their instructional leadership role. They strived to offer this support to their teachers in the form of an open door policy, as well as by fostering a climate where teachers were free to be risk takers.

Category 13: Trust

Trust is important in any relationship but can be more challenging to develop in schools. An “us and them” attitude can hinder a school’s growth in effective instruction and stifle its culture. The assistant principals in this study tried to foster trust by demonstrating their natural and honest concern for the children and adults in the building. Eight of the participants discussed how trust took time to develop but the benefits for instruction and school culture were worth the time involved.

Mia fostered trust because she saw it as a means to improve teaching. She thought it was important for her to trust teachers and for them to return that trust to her. She said, “In a micro sense, instructional leadership is bringing out the best in every teacher by creating a culture that says, I am good and I am getting better, or I am not quite so good and I am trying to get better.” She wanted her teachers to feel that they could take risks and that transitional difficulty was only temporary. She considered this task a challenge because even her strongest teachers were apprehensive about applying new knowledge. She explained how she saw trust in a school: “It is number one important in terms of relationships to make sure that I am a safe place for them to say whatever it is that they need to say.” She went further to explain,

I appreciate the dialogue. I don't like—and I make it very clear—“Don't lie to me. Tell me if you don't like [a new program]. I would rather hear that you don't like it than for you to try to put on a facade that you are doing it and I walk out of the door and you go back and do what you have been doing.” . . . I tell them, “If I feel that I can't trust you, then I am coming and I am watching and I am not going to give you the benefit of the doubt. I am ready for you to go at that point when you aren't telling me the truth. I can understand when you are having a hard time transitioning [into] something, having a hard time believing that this is worthwhile, having a hard time figuring out how to make it work.” I can respect that. I can't respect nodding in my face and then going back and doing something else that is questionable in terms of the benefits for the children. I make the relationship very important and try to get to know the people one on one.

Laurie had learned much about the perception of trust during her first year as an assistant principal. When she received her evaluation from her teachers at the end of the school year, she realized they saw her differently than she saw herself. However, she had spent time since then building those relationships among her staff and felt,

My teachers know that they can come to me, they can talk to me, but I expect their best in that classroom because I give my best outside the classroom. I think they had to understand that about me. They say, “You are firm, but you are fair.” . . . Those relationships are very important because that is where your trust is built.

Brad knew the negative effects of a lack of trust. He explained a situation that had happened in his building when the district office sent him late information:

It was last-minute kind of stuff that was from the mathematics department. But some other little things come along at the last minute, and teachers think that you just sat on it. And I said, “No. You get it when I get it. It doesn't do me any good to keep secrets from you. You are providing the instruction for the students. There is no advantage to keeping information from you.” And I was shocked that they would think that. And nobody ever said it, but you could tell when you would tell them things that they would think that you had been, I guess, either missing deadlines, or not keeping up with things, or not managing your time, . . . that you got stuck and so you just threw it at them at the last minute. I just had a little talk and tried to make sure that they understood that that was not the case.

During her first year as an administrator, Karen witnessed firsthand the lack of trust within the school building. She continually listened to how her principal and administrators in other schools did not trust teachers. She explained feeling disturbed:

It still bothers me a great deal to hear the administrators continually put down teachers for whatever reason: “They are trying to get away with this and trying to get away with that. They are going to the teachers’ lounge all the time and trying not to be in the classroom.” I think [this attitude] was the biggest surprise and disappointment and why I think I felt like I needed to do what I could do for teachers, to be their advocate. I once listened to someone in a meeting say, “Teachers will try to get away with this. Teachers will try to get away with that.” I thought, “Really?” I guess because that is not something I would ever do. But you need to become aware of that. [The person in the meeting] said, “You need to become aware of the fact that people are people, teachers are people. They are going to try to do what they can.” I was very surprised. I was very shocked. I thought, “Nice. Don’t [teachers] do anything well?”

The culture in Karen’s school was one of limited trust. This lack of trust had started at the top with her principal and filtered down to the entire staff. Not only her job as instructional leader but also the teachers’ job as educators were affected. She was looking forward to the new principal who would join her during the 2004-2005 school year.

It was easy to see how Maxine had established a sense of trust early in her career as an assistant principal. She had a warmth that had come from her experience with people and from within. She said, about beginning her job at her current school, “My first year at this new school, people were going through personal things, and they would come in, close the door, and cry. [They] could let down and then go back and do what they needed to do. So I feel like I have established a good relationship.”

One thing that facilitated the trust between Mary and her teachers was that her principal conducted all formal observations mandated by the district. These teacher examinations traditionally cause anxiety amongst teachers. Because she was only asked to do informal observations, Mary could focus on helping teachers grow as professionals, rather than evaluating them, a task often thought to inhibit trust between the administrator and teacher. Mary explained the situation at her school:

When I first became an Instructional Lead Teacher, we did not do [evaluation] at all. You were a teacher advocate, and they saw you as that. And as soon as we were trained to do

observations, it affected the relationship with the staff. I like that the principal does them because they don't see me in that same light. I think it is better for instruction if you don't have to do it formally. Because you can then go in there and sit down and, without it being threatening in any way say, "Let's talk about your lesson today." They tell you, "What did you think about . . . ?" . . . You can still hit the "Needs Improvement" area without putting it on a piece of paper.

Elizabeth tried to establish a sense of trust because it was a value of hers. She did not tolerate a lack of trust with her teachers: "I know we had a couple of teachers last year. They were going to do what they thought was right and had very passive-aggressive behaviors to your face: 'Oh, yeah, we are going to do that.' You found out they didn't do that. Those people are gone now."

Vicki said that the atmosphere in her building was strengthened by trust. She said, "The teachers feel comfortable coming to me and talking to me. I think those are always things that really support our goal, which is to 'Raise the Roof.'"

The assistant principals in this study learned the importance of trust within a school building. Although the task was challenging, as explained by Mia and Brad, they felt the investment was well worth the outcome. Karen, for instance, had experienced firsthand the debilitating effects of a lack of trust in a school. The outcome of a trusting environment took effort on the part of the assistant principals and principals, who had to create and foster trust by example.

Category 14: Accessibility

Accessibility is the extent to which a person makes him or herself available. Eight of the assistant principals interviewed were constantly accessible. Assistant principals not only need to be accessible, but they must also be able to communicate their availability to all stakeholders. Often this obligation means setting aside whatever they may be doing to make time to assist others. Although this approach can be very time-consuming and cause them to work on their own

tasks longer than otherwise would be necessary, it is important to the overall school climate to keep that “open door policy” at all times.

Teachers were not the only individuals to whom Lori made herself accessible. Often, parents visited her with various concerns because, Lori thought, they were less intimidated coming to her:

Parents sometimes find me more accessible than our principal because she is taking care of the overall building. They don't think they can disturb her. There is something with that title, . . . not that she is not accessible. She is more than happy to talk with parents. There is something about the title of principal that evokes some kind of fear in people, and they don't feel like she should be bothered. And so, they feel more comfortable coming to me.

Brad's accessibility sometimes caused him frustration. His availability would cause an erratic day that inhibited his performance of some instructional tasks. He talked about his experiences:

The teachers are great and they are hard workers, but the teacher interruptions. . . . During their planning time they would come and ask something . . . or, we don't have a lot of discipline problems, but, you know, if someone happened to have one that I needed to have a moment with...then they would bring the paperwork down. So there were a lot of interruptions. It is a very, very open-door school. [The principal's] door is always open, and so our doors are open. And so people are not scared. They feel almost compelled to come because it is so open. So it is frustrating when you are trying to get something done. You have to just breathe and listen because you don't want to give the impression that what they are concerned about is not important to you. You know, it might be something that you need to take care of right then, but sometimes it is not. It really wears on you. So you have to be very patient and flexible and count in your head. That is really it. I think that the biggest thing that kept me from doing things during the day were teacher interruptions. We don't have a lot of discipline problems. We don't have a lot of parent complaints. So . . . the teachers coming on their planning time. . . . They have 45 minutes every day. But if you have five teachers on a grade level and three of them come down to ask you something, then that is at least 15 minutes out of that 45. If you were working on something and you got interrupted three different times, then it just puts you further and further behind.

Patti said that accessibility was definitely important to being an instructional leader:

“Accessibility is why I work some 12-13 hour days, because I start my work in the afternoons

after school. I make myself accessible to everyone in the building during the day. That is probably why I am overworked.”

Karen also maintained an open-door policy. She felt she had an impact on teachers and students by being accessible: “I think being mostly available to teachers with whatever, . . . helping them with programs or projects they would like to do. Being right there and available to them, . . . I am here to help you in whatever areas are needed.” Karen constantly let her teachers know those areas she could assist them with and allowed them the autonomy to come to her as needed.

Maxine was accessible to her teachers. She said when she first arrived at her current school, “They just welcomed me with open arms, and it has become like family. And I think that is part of my philosophy. I don’t sit at my desk 100 percent of the day pushing paper. I try to be involved, open and accessible.”

Mary demonstrated her accessibility during the interviews. There were several times on the two different occasions that other individuals came to her to ask questions. She made herself readily available to assist them. She commented that, although it made it more difficult to complete a task she was working on, it was important to the overall school culture that she made herself accessible at all times.

Elizabeth did not feel she was as visible as she once had been although she still tried to maintain her accessibility. She commented, “Our visibility is decreasing because of the paperwork.” She talked about how this obstacle bothered her:

I am in [my office] more than I am in classrooms anymore. A lot of people, just by the nature of what the job has become, do not see me as much as they used to. It is kind of sad when people say, “How long have you been here?” I have been here longer than the principal has, and why don’t you know who I am? That is a commentary on our jobs.

Technology had aided Vicki in being accessible. She explained,

In this building, that would be one of the top things they would rank because I am accessible. If I am not accessible physically, they get me on e-mail. I am good about responding. I always respond right then and there. If I don't know the answer, I come back to it, but it will be the same day. I try not to let my e-mail back up.

Availability was a natural component of the participating assistant principals' role as instructional leader. They made themselves accessible to everyone, even at their own expense of limited time. They were visible because they wanted to make their school successful.

Assistant principals recognized the part that school climate plays in ensuring student learning. They helped create the positive climate with collaboration, support, trust, and being accessible. The efforts they put forth produced outcomes indispensable to a successful learning and teaching environment.

Based on the research, 14 common categories, grouped into 3 themes, emerged. These categories are supported by data and were discussed as factors that influence assistant principals as instructional leaders. According to the nine participants in this study, assistant principals experienced several influences on their primary role as instructional leaders: to ensure that learning is taking place. These influences included early leadership experiences; principals' practices; local, state, and federal mandates; management duties; faculty and staff; and personal motivation. Four actions were discussed as having the greatest impact on student learning: monitoring, commitment, sharing knowledge, and providing resources. Desired outcomes included four common themes: collaboration, support, trust, and accessibility, each contributing to a positive school climate. This chapter discussed the findings and themes. Chapter 5 presents the summary, discussion, and implications of this study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary assistant principals' perspectives of their instructional leadership role. This chapter presents a summary of the study, a discussion of the research findings, and implications for practitioners, school systems, and future researchers.

Summary of the Study

To explore elementary assistant principals' perspectives of their instructional leadership role, the researcher sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What does it mean to assistant principals to be an instructional leader?
2. In what ways, if any, are the actual duties and responsibilities of assistant principals congruent with the literature of instructional leadership?
3. What facilitates and/or hinders the assistant principal from exercising instructional leadership?

The study was conducted with elementary instructional assistant principals, purposeful sampling was used to select participants.

Methods of constant comparative analysis were used to collect, code, and analyze data. In depth, face-to-face initial interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted with nine elementary assistant principals during the summer of 2004. The researcher transcribed all audiotapes personally in order to enrich the process of data collection and analysis and to ensure accuracy. Symbolic interactionism was the guiding theoretical framework used to organize and drive this research and to guide the researcher's interpretations of the data. As the researcher

simultaneously collected and analyzed data, themes and categories emerged. Ongoing analysis revealed patterns among the participants' responses, and these findings yielded several theoretical ideas.

Data collected from the nine participants yielded information about the meaning instructional leadership held for them, what influenced their instructional leadership work, and what duties and responsibilities characterized their instructional leadership role. These data were grouped into 3 themes and 14 common categories, all of which were detailed in chapter 4 using the participants' words.

According to assistant principals participating in this study, being an instructional leader meant collaborating, supporting teachers, building trust, and being accessible. Furthermore, assistant principals' instructional leadership work was impacted by external and internal factors. These factors influenced their instructional leadership by facilitating and/or hindering the type and amount of instructional leadership assistant principals were able to provide. Key influences included early leadership experiences; principal practices; local, state, and federal mandates; management duties; faculty and staff; and personal motivation. This study also revealed that assistant principals considered ensuring student learning and establishing a positive school learning climate to be the most important elements of their instructional leadership role. The actions assistant principals employed to ensure learning and establish a positive climate included monitoring, commitment, sharing knowledge, and providing resources. These findings have important implications for the role of the assistant principals in educational leadership.

Discussion

Theoretical Ideas

Based on the research findings, five theoretical ideas emerged. These ideas are presented with examples from the study and are related to existing research pertaining to assistant principals and instructional leadership.

1. *The principal determines the type of instructional leadership that an assistant principal demonstrates.* Exactly how the assistant principal fulfills the instructional leadership role depends on the tasks, standards, and expectations set by the principal. As a result, the principal can act as a barrier or facilitator, depending on the relationship between the principal and the assistant principal and the type of leadership the principal provides.

Defining influences discussed by all nine participants were their respective current principals; they had the greatest influence on the assistant principal's ability to be instructional leaders. Furthermore, they defined—either formally, by something they said, or informally, by their actions—the assistant principal's instructional role. In most cases, this influence was positive. However, two assistant principals were negatively influenced by their school chief. One was not given any instructional leadership duties, which affected how she was able to do her job and ultimately affected the school climate. This assistant principal, Karen, described her powerlessness as debilitating. She characterized this principal as a “barrier” to her instructional leadership capacity: “I worked with a very strong leader who was the leader of the school and I was not.” She spoke of her difficult situation and went on to say, “Many of the decisions I made, questions that I answered, were overridden.” Karen identified this circumstance as damaging to her school. Another assistant principal, Elizabeth, talked about how her principal's weak leadership affected her own leadership. Elizabeth was frustrated in her current situation. She

talked about her principal having “selective hearing” and said that the principal’s attitude seemed to say, “As long as I don’t acknowledge that there is a problem, then I don’t have to address that problem.” Elizabeth went further to say,

When it comes to having an organization that is alive and growing, takes some forethought, takes some planning, she is not there. . . . She is not a planner. She will handle things that will jump up in her face, but as far as keeping things in motion to keep these things from happening, we don’t do that and it drives me crazy. It drives me crazy. . . . She thinks that if she just pretends that it is not there, then in her mind everything is okay.

Elizabeth explained that this lack of planning and communication was felt throughout the school.

Several participants discussed the relationship they had with their principals as one of being given autonomy to make decisions and act as true instructional leaders in their buildings. Mary said that she and her principal were often described, in a fond manner, as “a married couple” who together made a great leadership team for the school. Maxine explained that she and her principal were “soul mates in education.” Their teaming was a perfect match, and Maxine considered herself fortunate to be in her position.

Taken together, these findings are consistent with existing research on school leadership. Indeed, the instructional leadership role of the assistant principal is almost always determined by the principal (Gorton, 1987; Kelly, 1987). According to Gorton (1987), “The principal is the key to improving the assistant principalship. National studies and reports can be helpful, but no other entity has greater impact on the fortunes of an assistant principal in a specific school than the principal of that school” (p. 3). The findings of this study illustrate this phenomenon of the power and influence the principal has over the assistant principal.

If the assistant principal is allowed to act as an instructional leader, it is with the principal’s consent. The stakeholders’ view of the assistant principal is created by the principal; furthermore, the job of the assistant principal is defined by the roles assigned by the principal.

Indeed, Hess (1985) found that principals will often take the interesting leadership tasks for themselves and assign the remainder to the assistant principal. The behavior of the principal, a more subtle way of control, can make a difference in the amount of leadership practiced by the assistant principal. Role images created by principals include the relationships that are allowed, issues of control and authority, and rewards and punishments (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Some principals instill an image of an autocratic and distant administrator. Others maintain an image of a facilitator and learner. Assistant principals must simply conform to what is established.

2. *External influences, in the form of mandates, hinder assistant principals by forcing attention toward programs and paperwork and away from an instructional focus.* This study found that as accountability and outside influences on schools increased, the assistant principals' role became increasingly centered on reports, computer scheduling programs, and other custodial duties that kept them in their offices and out of the classrooms. Assistant principals were working with students and teachers less than they felt was necessary to maintain quality instruction. The schools where the assistant principals were employed were as diverse as each of the participants in this study, but all the participants saw student learning as their number one goal. All felt that external forces at the district, state, and federal levels inhibited them from doing more of the things they considered key for instructional leadership behaviors by diminishing their autonomy and decision-making power.

Local, state, and federal mandates also had a strong impact on the instructional leadership that assistant principals were able to provide at the school level. All of the assistant principals described these policies as barriers to instructional leadership. Every year, there are more demands placed on assistant principals; however, the time and resources available have not increased so that all tasks can be completed (Glanz, 1994). Thus, to a certain degree, assistant

principals have become powerless (Marshall, 1992). Several assistant principals in the present study mentioned how they had always tried to improve student achievement through creative approaches, but found they could no longer do so. They had to follow strict guidelines dictated by politicians and lawmakers. Elizabeth explained how this impacted her instructional leadership role:

I feel I looked for different things than I look for now. I looked for creativity, time on task, to make sure the lesson plans were addressing the ITBS objectives. Now, I am looking for compliance. Do we have time to check for creativity as well as complying with the law? We have to teach the QCC's. We have to be on this pacing calendar; you have to be at the right place on the pacing calendar. I think the teachers feel like we have taken so much out of their hands that they don't have as much discretion as they used to.

Brad was frustrated by some of the decisions being made at the state level that affected the instructional program at the school level, explaining, "Sometimes I don't think that politicians are motivated by what is important to our schools." Brad went further to say,

As far as what I can do personally, I can be proactive and stay informed. It is constant change. Some things are dictated specifically, and some things are left open to interpretation. You have to make sure you do whatever is ethically and morally responsible so you can take care of your kids that are in your building without getting yourself fired or in trouble or in the news.

According to Firestone and Wilson (1985), school leaders are frequently constrained by external policies such as local board policies, state laws, and federal laws. Assistant principals must follow laws and policies while performing as instructional leaders. These outside influences can hinder school leaders. According to Kriekard and Norton (1980), who examined the roles of assistant principals, only 1 out of 6 tasks and 3 out of 21 competencies dealt directly with instruction. Many of the specific tasks assistant principals perform are considered clerical (Cartwell, 1993; Koru, 1993; Marshall, 1992). The tremendous number of reports for which they are responsible can be overwhelming and time consuming and can cause role ambiguity (Kelly, 1987; Marshall, 1992). More time should be available for instructional supervision. This time

will not be afforded to them until current practices and the ongoing focus on external mandates are reconsidered.

This study confirmed that external policies are time-demanding, often inhibiting to assistant principals pursuing an instructional connection. Some assistant principals attempted “creative compliance” to meet policy requirements along with their school’s individual needs.

3. *Positive school climate and behaviors of assistant principals enhance the learning environment.* This study determined that a positive learning climate starts with the school administration and is dependent on the interactions that occur in the building. Assistant principals see the value of working together, and they foster partnership by encouraging collaboration on school goals. This approach was exemplified by research participants who asked teachers to assist in goal setting. Assistant principals enhanced a positive school climate by supporting teachers both personally and professionally. This support was established in part by the accessibility of the assistant principal. Maxine explained why she thought accessibility was so important,

I try during the day to be accessible to everyone, whether it is the custodian, teacher, principal, parents, and a lot of the detail work that I have to do I do after hours. Because I feel like we are all a team and if I tell them, “I can’t help you,” then when I am asking them to join together for our big vision, they will go like, “Why?” That is my most personal philosophy.

Extant research supports the importance of the school climate as a predictor of student achievement (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Halpin & Croft, 1963). Past research has attempted to investigate the influence that the school principal has on the atmosphere in the building (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulidas, 1990; Krug, 1992). This study, however, showed that assistant principals perceive one of their responsibilities to be the creation

and maintenance of a positive learning climate by ensuring teachers are satisfied, a task that positively affects quality instruction (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988).

Leadership behaviors affect school climate, indirectly affecting student achievement (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bredeson, 1989; Halpin & Croft, 1963; Kirby & Colbert, 1992).

According to Baron and Uhl (1995), instructional leadership refers to the direction, resources, and support provided by principals to staff members to improve teaching and learning. Behaviors that indicate a stronger level of leadership and are important predictors of academic success involve school governance, building a strong climate, and organizing and monitoring the school's instructional program (Blase & Blase, 2003; Cawelti, 1987).

Assistant principals in this study recognized the importance of standards and accountability, but they asserted that, to achieve results, the school climate needed to be one that promoted support, trust, and a sense of collaboration. Past studies have focused on the role the principal plays in school leadership and shaping the school climate (Barth, 1990; Blase, 1993). According to this research, however, assistant principals also play an important role in establishing a positive school culture. This study demonstrated that assistant principals were actively involved in creating a positive learning climate and monitoring the instructional program. Assistant principals, sometimes more than principals, are the ones to whom the teachers look for guidance, support, and resources. Due to the nature of the position, they are often viewed by teachers and other school players as more accessible.

4. *Assistant principals' role socialization into leadership emerges while serving in an informal leadership capacity as a teacher prior to obtaining the administrative position.*

Organizational Socialization refers to "the process by which one is taught and learns the ropes of a particular organizational role" (Van Maanan & Schein, 1979, p. 211). The beginning of the

process usually takes place before one assumes the formal position (Greenfield, 1985a). This study found that socialization into the role of assistant principal began during the “teachership.” Assistant principals were “groomed” into that position informally by an assistant principal or principal with whom they had worked. This socialization was achieved when good leadership behaviors, attitudes, and values were recognized and opportunities were provided for them by their principals to practice instructional leadership. The assistant principals who participated in this research valued those experiences and referred to them as positive external influences.

All nine of the participants discussed specific experiences they had had while they were classroom teachers that helped shape how they viewed instructional leadership. These experiences often included interactions with administrators who saw the individuals as emerging leaders while they were still teachers. Often, the future assistant principals did not see in themselves a potential for leadership, and another individual had to reveal that potential. They were afforded opportunities to demonstrate and practice leadership in a variety of ways while serving in a teaching capacity. This experience helped encourage them to embrace instructional leadership and positioned a few to move from the teacher to assistant principal role in their current school.

Catherine Marshall has conducted an extensive amount of research surrounding principal role socialization theory (Marshall, 1985, 1992; Marshall et al., 1992). Her studies have shown that principals are socialized by experiences and other professionals while they are in the assistant principalship and that these ideas and behaviors are carried over into the principalship. She theorized that these external influences can potentially be detrimental to the job that someone does because they prevent professional growth, which ultimately stifles the individual in the new role (Marshall, 1993). The findings of the present study demonstrate that role

socialization for the assistant principalship began during the time individuals were serving in the teaching capacity. The participants in this study explained that the events that helped shape the way they perceived instructional leadership and the assistant principal's role occurred prior to their stepping into the formal role of assistant principal.

These findings correlate with Marshall's work in the secondary schools, but go one step further. According to Marshall (1992), a "Career Socialization" process begins in the assistant principalship and continues into the principalship, making the assistant principalship the first rung of the ladder of school leadership. The training and experience are viewed as important to the practice of leadership for the most important top school administrative position. This study suggests that teachers who demonstrate appropriate talents have already stepped onto the first rung of the leadership ladder.

5. Assistant principals are driven by their desire to help students learn and will do what is necessary to see students achieve. Assistant principals often have a love of learning that permeates all the duties they perform. The assistant principals in this study were either working on advanced degrees or expanding their knowledge by staying current on research about teaching and student learning. Although assistant principals did not see themselves as "experts," the teachers they supported often commented to them on their expertise and acknowledged their credibility in relation to classroom instruction.

Assistant principals were personally motivated to perform their instructional leadership roles. The nine participants seemed to bring this essential personal passion for student learning to the job. For example, Mia was placed in a school that had been identified by the state as one that was failing to meet its criteria. Mia talked about how she liked working at a school with stringent needs and how she was warned when she took the position of assistant principal for instruction

that scores needed to improve by the end of the school year. She said, “I liked that. I liked the challenge of, here is what we have to do. Let’s get in there and do it. And it made everybody ready.” Those who seek the assistant principalship and remain in the position possess an internal motivation to be instructional leaders for students as well as teachers. They are determined to do, within the power afforded them by the external influences mentioned above, what is necessary to help teachers help students.

It is noteworthy that two of the assistant principals, Maxine and Mary, each had an opportunity to be promoted to the principalship, but they declined, stating they wanted to remain, “closer to instruction.” One assistant principal, Mia, had been interviewing for a principalship and was concerned that the politics of the position would get in the way of her instructional leadership.

Assistant principals also considered themselves a knowledge resource for teachers. As part of their instructional leadership role, they had to be prepared to provide teachers with new approaches, ideas, etc. to address barriers affecting a student’s achievement. Mia talked about this role: “I feel that I have the tools and the knowledge and that I know what needs to be done. I read a lot. I read a lot about good schools. I read a lot about instructional leadership and what needs to be done.”

This study suggests that although many barriers existed that limited assistant principals’ ability to act as instructional leaders (Bush, 1997; Gorton & Kattman, 1985), they were strongly motivated by a personal commitment to helping students learn. With the enormous number of hours spent beyond the school day on completing necessary paperwork and clerical duties (Cantwell, 1993; Koru, 1993), these educators frequently talked about wishing they had help from someone who could complete these non-instructional tasks. According to Cornell (2003), a

higher level of job dissatisfaction results from extrinsic factors, such as working conditions, district policies, and inadequate relationships with principals. Assistant principals' tremendous workload also acts as an interference that can contribute to burnout.

The section above explicated theoretical ideas that emerged from the data and related those ideas to past research. The next section provides a thorough discussion of the relevance of this study.

Relevance of the Study

Findings of the study were detailed in chapter 4 and summarized in the first section of chapter 5. Five theoretical ideas supported by the data and relating to existing research were described in the previous section. The purpose of this section is to explore how these findings are significant.

This study has established that the role of the instructional assistant principal in the elementary school is a complex one; furthermore, the demands placed on the individual are often inconsistent and conflict with each other. Lack of clarity and direction make the role even more difficult. Being held accountable by all stakeholders in the education system, and sometimes by policy makers alone, can lead to discrepancies in expectations.

Past research has been insufficient in the area of leadership and the elementary assistant principal. Researchers have often ignored leadership roles in schools other than the principal, despite the fact that other school personnel are also involved in leading instruction (Heller & Firestone, 1995). This study has determined that an assistant principal does indeed make meaningful contributions to a school's instructional program. As a result, the traditional role and work of the assistant principal should be reconceived as a collaborative position with the principal and other school personnel.

According to Elmore (2003), successful leaders have an explicit theory of what good instructional practice looks like: “They model their own learning and theories of learning in their work, work publicly on the improvement of their own practice, and engage others in powerful discourse about good instruction” (p. 9). The most successful principals engage their staff members in decision making and collaboration; however, this distributed leadership is too often an underachieved ideal (Scherer, 2002). School leadership is important in promoting shared vision for instruction, collaboration, and collective responsibility for student achievement (Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003). Without this shared accountability, which blends leadership roles of different individuals, student achievement will not reach its potential. The idea of “distributed leadership is crucial for improving an organization’s performance” (Elmore, 2002b, p. 25).

Traditionally, the work of people is organized around their individual parts and the parts do not always connect in a meaningful way. Assistant principals in this study talked about their roles but did not always directly link them to other leaders present in their building. Although all participants discussed their early leadership experiences and being socialized into their leadership role, the participants did not reflect on their own obligation to help shape teachers in their own buildings as instructional leaders. However, a connection between instructional practices and a person’s personal practices should be established. According to the idea of distributed leadership, knowledge and practice are stretched across roles rather than contained in one role or another (Elmore, 2002a). In this ideal context, leaders surface and assume different responsibilities according to their knowledge and competence.

Research on the roles of teachers is expanding but has not attempted to understand the leadership of the principal and assistant principal in collaboration (Spillane et al., 2003). This

researcher confirmed that in order to comprehend the school-leadership practices, a composite of leadership must be examined. According to Spillane et al. (2003), “In order to understand school leadership, it is necessary not only to understand the practice of each of those who lead, but also to understand the relations among those leading practices” (p. 535). Consequently, strong school leadership is not a function of what one leader knows and does; rather, it is based on the dynamic interaction of various school leaders and their situation around specific leadership tasks (Spillane et al., 2003). Careful consideration must be taken regarding leadership characteristics and dynamics when charging an assistant principal and principal together with the responsibility of instructionally leading a school.

Those who choose the assistant principalship must be properly prepared. Universities and school districts need to professionalize the assistant principalship by providing coursework and ongoing, relevant training designed to meet the complex needs of the position. Additionally, those in the principalship need to understand the responsibility they have in cultivating leadership and providing clear role delineation. Otherwise, assistant principals may continue to involve themselves in isolated practices at the school level in response to the principal’s practices and local, state, and federal demands placed upon them.

Implications

This section presents the implications of this study of assistant principals’ perspectives on their instructional leadership role for principals, school systems, and future research.

Implications for Principals

The findings of this research study demonstrate that instructional leadership is being practiced by assistant principals but that such leadership is limited due to existing external influences. The conditions within the school, usually created by the principal, can hinder or

facilitate an assistant principal's instructional leadership role. Principals must examine their own behavior, leadership method, and relationships with their assistant principals to ensure they are maximizing the talents of "the second in command." Areas where the most immediate, greatest impact could be felt would be in hiring and in role and responsibility development.

Questions related to hiring practices emerged from the findings of this study: Who is responsible for hiring the assistant principal of a school? Is consideration given to how the principal and assistant principal will function as a team?

Principals are provided latitude to develop the scope of assistant principal roles and responsibilities. What resources are principals provided to help them in developing role and responsibility requirements for their assistant principals? Are those roles and responsibilities communicated effectively? What knowledge or assistance are principals provided to help them in developing the organizational structure at their schools to provide assistant principals support in meeting defined responsibilities?

Principals must examine their leadership behaviors and assess to what extent they are practicing distributed leadership. Assistant principals possess instructional leadership skills that need to be groomed.

Implications for School Systems

The results of this study indicate that assistant principals often begin their socialization as school leaders during experiences with administrators while they are in the "teachership." Candidates given extensive practice as teacher leaders will have a knowledge base and experience level that will help them as assistant principals. How is that knowledge being cultivated? Are school administrators sharing leadership opportunities with their teachers? Modifications should also be considered with regard to recruitment. When teachers are identified

as potential leaders, administrators should develop those capabilities. Given projected shortcomings in qualified candidate pools, answers to these questions could have significant impact on creating succession candidates for future principal openings.

Other results of this study point to the impact assistant principals have on the school climate. Research shows that the climate of a school can heavily influence student learning. If mandates pertaining to test scores and improved student achievement are to be met, school climate maintenance and development must be a top priority: What is being done to ensure that assistant principals receive structured developed guidance in creating positive learning environments?

The time spent on monitoring amounts to the extra time assistant principals must spend after school and on the weekends completing paperwork. Although various obstacles surface, an assistant principal will often stretch limits to get the job done. For example, Patti talked about the extra hours she worked in the evenings so that she could devote her days to teachers and students: “I work some 12-13 hour days. . . . That is probably why I am overworked.”

These findings relate to research that examines how assistant principals spend their time. Cantwell (1993) found that assistant principals’ daily time was spent on clerical and organizational duties. The assistant principals do spend a large amount of time on these duties; however, because their nature as individuals, they still do what is necessary to fulfill their instructional leadership roles. One concern this dedication raises is the toll it takes on these “overachievers.”

Demands on school administrators are currently increasing at phenomenal rates. In certain cases, the state and federal governments have placed unreasonable expectations on school administrators. The work that is expected of the assistant principal is relentless. Consequently,

school systems need to examine the tasks and responsibilities placed upon assistant principals. An inventory of these tasks should be made to identify those directly related to curriculum and instruction and those that are clerical in nature. A position created to perform secretarial tasks will allow the assistant principal to focus on practices that will increase student learning and achievement.

These demands guide the type of instructional leader an assistant principal can be as well as the amount of instructional leadership that will occur. This study determined that these factors can lead to role ambiguity, an observation that confirms previous research stating that assistant principals often experience a sense of futility and ineffectiveness when what they want to do in the role and what the actual role encompasses interfere with each other (Kelly, 1987; Marshall, 1992).

Implications for Future Research

As previously noted, studies of the elementary assistant principal have been virtually absent in the literature. Lack of research focusing on the work and role of the assistant principal as an instructional leader at the elementary school level leaves a wide avenue of potential research.

This study focused on the perspectives of assistant principals. To explore more fully the intricacies of the person and the position, additional information regarding other school stakeholders' perspectives should be gathered and analyzed. Because this study found that principals had the strongest direct influence on the assistant principal's instructional leadership, studies on how principals and their assistant principals work and learn together could offer valuable insight. Also worthy of exploration would be teacher and student perspectives on the assistant principalship. What characteristics or duties of the assistant principal are seen as having

the largest impact on teachers and learners? How do those perspectives compare to what assistant principals view as their most direct effect on instruction?

The assistant principal is a significant component of school cohesion. The job of assistant principal is a “workhorse job” filled by a person who makes sure that the school runs smoothly. With all that they are expected to do, and as demands continue to increase, what are the effects on their job satisfaction? What is the career life span of an assistant principal? Are policies, laws, and accountability influencing the tenure of those holding the assistant principal position? The potential for continued research is deep. The instructional leadership role of assistant principals is an interesting phenomenon with important implications for student achievement and school effectiveness.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FORM

Assistant Principals' Perspectives of their Instructional Leadership Role Consent Form:

- I agree to take part in research entitled, *Assistant Principals' Perspectives of their Instructional Leadership Role* conducted by Tricia Ballew Sumpter, Doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at the University of Georgia. I do not have to be in this study if I do not want to be; I can stop taking part at any time without giving reason and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed. The researcher's advisor is Dr. Jo Blase, Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, University of Georgia: XXX-XXX-XXXX. The principal researcher, Tricia Ballew Sumpter, can be reached at XXX-XXX-XXXX/ XXX-XXX-XXX / tricia_b_sumpter@fc.dekalb.k12.ga.us

The following points have been explained to me:

- The purpose of this study is to explore elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their roles as instructional leaders and compare those perceptions to current research on instructional leadership.
- There may be some benefit to me for agreeing to take part in this study. I will be given an opportunity to reflect orally on my roles and perceptions of being an instructional leader in my current position as an elementary assistant principal.
- There may be some benefit to humankind resulting from my participation. School systems could recognize current practices that are inhibiting assistant principals as instructional leaders. By bringing attention to these current practices, school leaders can begin identifying ways to use assistant principals time more effectively and thus ultimately see an increase in academic achievement.
- If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:
 - Participate in an interview (approximately 1 ½ hours) with the researcher. The interview will be scheduled in a time and place agreeable to both the researcher and myself.
 - During the interview, I will be asked to tell about my roles as an assistant principal and instructional leader and my perceptions of those roles. The interview will be tape-recorded. After the interview, the tape will be made into a written record that uses made-up names. I will receive a written copy of the interview. After reading the written copy of the interview, I will be contacted by the researcher and will be able to comment on or correct the copy. A follow-up interview may be requested by the researcher, also anticipated to last approximately 1 ½ hours.
- No discomfort or risk is expected during the interview(s).
- Any information obtained about me as a participant in this study, including my identity, will be held confidential, except as required by law. My identity will be protected with a made-up name, and all data, including audiotapes, will be kept in a secured, limited access location

for a period of five years. All data will be destroyed on December 5, 2009. My identity will not be revealed in any publication of the results of the study.

- The researcher will answer any further questions about the researcher, now or during the course of the project. The principal researcher, Tricia Ballew Sumpter, can be reached at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Researcher)

(Date)

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (XXX) XXX-XXXX; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about your path to the assistant principalship
2. Talk a little about the assistant principalship.
3. What does “instructional leadership” mean to you?
4. How much of your day is spent directly on curriculum and instruction?
5. What duties do you currently perform that you see as having the most direct effect on improved instruction / student achievement?
6. Are there any barriers that inhibit you from exercising leadership to the best of your ability?
7. Are there any things that facilitate you in being an instructional leader?

APPENDIX C

COMMON THEMES AS REPORTED BY INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|--------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| MC | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | |
| KS | X | X | | | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| LC | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| BS | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | X | X | X |
| PG | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | | X |
| MK | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X |
| ME | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| EC | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| VM | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Totals | 9 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 7 |

Influences on Assistant Principals' Instructional Leadership Role

1. Early Leadership Experiences
2. Principal's Practices
3. Local, State, and Federal Mandates
4. Management Duties
5. Faculty and Staff
6. Personal Motivation

Assistant Principals' Actions as Instructional Leaders

7. Monitoring
8. Commitment
9. Sharing Knowledge
10. Providing Resource

Desired Outcomes of Instructional Leadership

11. Collaboration
12. Support
13. Trust
14. Accessibility