THE PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE FIRST YEAR OF THE RECOVERY OF A LOW-PERFORMING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

by

ROBERT FRANCIS SUMOWSKI, JR.

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ABSTRACT

This study chronicles the experiences, challenges, and barriers faced by an elementary principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school in Central Georgia whose superintendent mandated the implementation of an external, state-appointed, school improvement team. The school improvement team chose the America's Choice program as its model for recovering the low-performing school. The constant comparative method of data analysis was incorporated in this qualitative case study. Drawing from research in the fields of mental health, emergency management, environmental philosophy, medicine, and law, the researcher introduces the construct of recovery as an alternative philosophy to those of restructuring and reconstitution during the reform of low-performing and failing schools. Results indicated the principal faced challenges in the areas of communication, conflict with the school improvement team and its team leader, time management, and the maintenance of both staff and personal morale during the first year of recovery. The principal viewed the intervention itself as an intrusion and an affront to the school, staff, and himself due to the school's demonstrated progress in student achievement during the two years prior to the implementation of the school improvement team. The effects on the principal included his lack of confidence in the intervention, questioning his role as school leader, and questioning his future at the school. At the conclusion of the first year, the principal feared a negative impact on student achievement, an emotional effect on the school's self-image as expressed by the staff, and held a tentative view toward the school's future. After the emergence of an improved state of communication between the principal and his superiors, the local superintendent and Board of Education decided to abandon both the school improvement team and America's Choice at the conclusion of the first year of recovery. Discussion and implications are presented for principals, hiring committees, and school system leaders contemplating recovery efforts in other low-performing schools. Further implications for the construct of recovery are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Low-performing schools, Failing schools, Accountability, Takeovers, Recovery, Restructuring, Reconstitution, School improvement teams, America's Choice, Principal perspectives.

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DEDICATION

In a conversation with my 89 year-old grandmother during a visit to Chicago, Illinois, the city of my birth, in the summer of 1998, I learned a great deal about the roots of this endeavor. The road that led to this endeavor began with the dream of my great-grandfather, Roman Shibovich, a coalminer in Benton, Illinois and a man I never knew. Between 1910-1920, the Polish immigrant, deeply fearful for his children's futures, doggedly insisted that each of them leave Benton and move to the growing city of Chicago to make their livelihoods, rather than face the dim prospects offered by lives working the coal mines under the fields of southern Illinois. As each son finished school, he was given a train ticket to join his brothers in an apartment my great-grandfather supported. In the 1920s, the youngest daughter, my grandmother, joined them. Roman's dream was that each of his children be afforded a better and more dignified quality of life than that which he had known. Roman's American dream happened. Each generation since has progressively gone a bit further than the previous one. To Roman, I offer a hardy, *"Na Zdoroveya!"* (Translated from the Polish: "Here's to you.")

To my father, Robert Francis Sumowski, Sr., who passed in 1979 when I was twelve: You always told me never to give up, and that I could be anything in this world. I listened.

To Mom, who carried the torch and sacrificed throughout her own life, peppered with stories of outhouses and ketchup soup. She has lived for her two sons, making sure both of us had every opportunity possible to thrive in this world. I'm forever grateful.

To Steve, my younger brother whose life ended tragically in 2000, one month before I began the doctoral program: Here it is, my friend.

To Dr. W.C. Whitley, a principal for 43 years and my chief mentor for the 11 years since his retirement. This would have never happened if it weren't for your support and influence on me. You took over where Dad left off, and you'll never know how much it means to me.

To Liza, my dear partner and wife: You are the strength behind everything I do. Everything. I have never known the love and happiness that we have shared over the past seven years. You are my hero.

And to Amara, my ten year-old daughter, whose wisdom encouraged me to make this leap when I doubted myself early in the process: You are the future, and I love you with all of my heart and soul. The circle is real. Dreams do indeed come true, my dear one.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of one elementary principal whose school (grades 3-5) was rated by the State of Georgia as being unsatisfactory and whose superintendent elected to have an external, state-appointed school improvement team assist in the recovery of this low-performing school. The duration of the study spanned one school year, 2001-2002. The knowledge discovered through such a study might assist principals, school systems, and others interested in understanding the challenges and issues affecting a principal during the first year in the recovery of a low-performing school being assisted by an external agency. It might also serve to help prevent failure in other schools.

Statement of the Problem

Many U.S. schools have been judged to be low-performing or failing according to a variety of state criteria, the most common of which involves student scores on state achievement tests (Christie & Ziebarth, 2001; Knowles & Knowles, 2001; Olson, 1999; Rouk, 2000). In a study examining dropout statistics in the nation's 35 largest cities, Balfans and Letgers (2001) admitted, "little is known about how many of these failing schools there are, where they are located, and who attends them" (p. 2), then estimated, "about half of the high schools in the nation's 35 largest cities have severe dropout rates" (p. 12).

In contrast to the practice of utilizing student scores on achievement tests as criteria for identifying schools as low-performing or failing, there is the argument that the use of standards and test scores alone to assess the quality and progress of schools is an overly simplistic way to assess such a complex issue as school performance (Gratz, 2000; Maehr & Maehr, 1996; Reeves, 2001). Nevertheless, the trend to use standardized testing as a benchmark in identifying a school's overall success seems to have been embraced by policymakers nationwide (Christie & Ziebarth, 2000). The public and elected officials are demanding that school officials either turn around these schools considered to be in crisis or to be held accountable for unacceptable results (Ziebarth, 2001).

The school official closest to a failing school is the principal, who feels the pressure to "turn things around," from parents who are demanding radical changes to ensure the level of instruction necessary to improve students' academic results, usually measured in test scores (Association of Washington School Administrators, 1999; Carlin, 1992; Gallegos, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The principal also feels pressure from his superiors—the superintendent, the board of education, and the community in which the school is located. No one in a school building is more vulnerable to accountability than its principal, and Carlin (1992) asserted that the principal is "more accountable than teachers because he or she can be removed from the position more easily" (p. 48).

A logical solution to the dilemma of low-performing and failing schools would involve the placement of principals with the greatest abilities in vision, management, and academic standards to lead them. Still, even if possessing all of the aforementioned

abilities, a principal cannot simultaneously teach every class, nurture every student and staff member, and manage every aspect of the academic program of a school. The principal needs the help of other professionals to develop a climate conducive to success (Abelmann & Elmore, 1999; Carlin, 1992; Kaplan & Evans, 1997; Schwan & Spady, 1998). The ability to identify the particular challenges, issues, and factors encountered by a principal attempting the recovery of a low-performing or failing school is an essential first step toward the school's actual recovery. However, one cannot cope with barriers until one first identifies them.

The Framework of the Study

As the 21st century begins, schools and school systems that do not measure up to new standards will face serious consequences from external agencies such as state departments of education. During the past decade in the United States, countless elementary, middle, and high schools have been "taken over" by district and/or state educational leaders in over twenty states, most notably in California, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, and Texas. Exact numbers vary depending upon the definition used to describe takeovers. Nationwide, 32 states have sanctions in place for low-performing schools while 19 states possess the authority to implement more comprehensive reforms such as reconstitution (Ziebarth, 2001).

In Georgia, schools currently are identified as low-performing by the state School Improvement Team Program, utilizing fourth and eighth grade student Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) scores, though any intervention for low-performing schools is voluntary (Nettie Holt, Georgia Department of Education, personal communication, August 24, 2001). Beginning in 2003-2004, Georgia schools may be

judged as low-performing or failing by the Office of Education Accountability based on student scores on achievement tests (Brenda Hayes, Office of Educational Accountability, personal communication, July 26, 2001).

External Restructuring Efforts

The idea of the school takeover means different things to different schools, systems, and government entities. Takeovers have been implemented under the names of restructuring, reform, reconstitution, and redesign, among others (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). Consistent with the varying definition of takeovers, there are also a variety of methods by which schools have been taken over and by whom. In Chicago, local school councils comprised of parents, educators, and community leaders were created for each school and given the authority to hire and fire principals (Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Smiley, Crowson, Chou, & Levin, 1994). Chicago also adopted the use of specially designed school improvement teams as "last-ditch" attempts to turn around failing schools prior to absolute takeover (Stunard, 1997).

In North Carolina, special teams of experienced educators have been assigned to low-performing schools to monitor progress and suggest changes (Sandham, 2001). Similarly, in Baltimore, new school models such as the *Calvert School Model*, "a highly specified school reform design," (Stringfield, 1998) and *Success For All*, a program focusing on the improvement of reading skills, have been introduced in low-performing and failing schools (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). School systems in Florida, Texas, San Francisco, and elsewhere have begun to use a process called reconstitution, in which the principals and entire staffs of failing schools have been dismissed. The low-

performing or failing school is closed, then reopened the following semester under new leadership (Koury, 2000; United States Department of Education, 1998).

School Takeovers as a Form of Restructuring

School takeovers are motivated by political pressure. Early in his first term, President George W. Bush made accountability in education a key priority of his administration, calling for the use of both takeovers and school choice so that parents would be able to pull their children from failing schools and send them elsewhere at the taxpayer's expense (Wegner & Fulton, 2001). Bush suggested and congress passed federal legislation that will require accountability testing for all students in grades 3-8. The legislation will also require all 50 states to participate in a program of accountability called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Lewis, 2001).

Despite the differences in the method of school takeovers, it appears that mandated school accountability through drastic measures such as school takeovers is building momentum and likely to continue. Former Secretary of Education Richard Riley summarized the current movement during a speech delivered on February 18, 1997 as such:

> We cannot and must not tolerate failing schools. We need to stop making excuses and get on with the business of fixing our schools. We have the unique opportunity to do what is best for our children. This should be our great patriotic cause, our national mission: Giving all of our children a world-class education by putting standards of excellence into action. (United States Department of Education, 1998)

In an illustration of the continuity and consistency between the former and current presidential administrations regarding policies for failing schools, current Secretary of Education Roderick Paige stated, “I understand that education is primarily a local and

state responsibility. But our federal government cannot stand by and tolerate failing schools, because America will not tolerate it" (2001). To this end, President George W. Bush signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) into law in January 2002, a sweeping law calling for federally mandated testing for all students in grades 3-8 and posing consequences for low-performing schools, which fail to show improvement (Robelen, 2002). Yet, it is noted that, regardless of the method chosen, any attempt at school reform cannot be a "quick fix," and Fullan (2001) suggested that a period of three years is needed before an elementary school can achieve a substantial turnaround.

Accountability

Accountability is a key issues facing education today (Ahearn, 2000; Archer, 2000; Gallegos, 2000; Jacobson, 2001; Knowles & Knowles, 2001; Lewis, 2000; Olson, 2001; Paige, 2001; Underwood, 2001). In Georgia, the setting of the present study, the state legislature and current governor have passed extensive laws recently in an attempt to help reverse downward trends in student achievement levels in order to improve the quality of education in Georgia's schools (Governor Roy Barnes' A-Plus Education Reform, 2000). The first step in Georgia's reform effort was the passage of House Bill 1187 in 2000, commonly identified as "A-Plus Education Reform." Although HB 1187 did not address failing or low-performing schools directly, it laid the groundwork for state accountability by creating the Office of Education Accountability, charged with examining and issuing report cards grading each school on a scale of A to F twice yearly in the areas of achievement and improvement beginning 2003-2004 (Governor Roy Barnes' A+ Education Reform, 2000).

In Georgia, there is currently no formal method of identifying schools as low-performing or failing on the annual report card issued to each school by the Georgia Department of Education. According to Brenda Hayes (personal communication, July 26, 2001) of the Office for Education Accountability, this organization is scheduled to issue its first report card, which will identify schools as failing or low-performing using grades A to F, during school year 2003-2004. This report card will replace the one currently issued by the Georgia Department of Education.

Though the State of Georgia currently has no formal means of identifying schools as low-performing or failing, the state School Improvement Team Program, a division of the Georgia Department of Education, currently identifies schools as candidates for external, state school improvement team intervention according to student scores on the fourth and eighth grade Criteria Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs). If 50 per cent or more of a school's students' reading and/or mathematics scores are identified by the CRCT as *does not meet* standards, the school is eligible for intervention (Nettie Holt, Director, School Improvement Teams, Georgia Department of Education, personal communication, August 24, 2001). Still, this intervention is voluntary, as school improvement teams are not assigned unless requested by individual counties' superintendents.

When called upon for assistance by local system superintendents, the state department assigns external school improvement teams to visit sites at intervals throughout the school year for the purpose of implementing programs designed to improve student achievement. Beginning in 2004-2005, the school improvement teams *may* become mandated for schools defined as low-performing, and the Office of

Educational Accountability has assembled a committee to recommend whether the school improvement teams will be voluntary or mandated at that time (Office of Educational Accountability, 2001).

To date, the Georgia General Assembly has yet to formally address consequences or takeovers of low-performing or failing schools (Georgia General Assembly, 2001). However, the Governor's Office of Accountability (2001) declared, "schools performing at lower levels will be eligible to receive enhanced technical assistance and focused intervention by the Department of Education through school improvement teams" (p. 1). It seemed that after years of presenting a blank check to those who operate school systems, the public and state legislature was demanding more and more to know why education in Georgia appeared to be substandard (Archer, 2000; Jacobson, 2001).

Research on the Principal and School Takeovers

As instructional leader, the principal is ultimately responsible for all aspects of a school's performance. Principals are held accountable for student academic success, the selection and management of competent personnel and faculty, appropriate resource management, and the creation of a safe and productive school climate (Association of Washington School Administrators, 1999; Carlin, 1992; Schwahn & Spady, 1998).

It is widely held that each principal sets the vision and tone of the school building and its occupants (Abelmann & Elmore, 1999). Calabrese and Zepeda (1996) emphasized the importance of decision-making in addition to vision as a key to principal success, stating, "Any vision is useless unless the principal understands how to make decisions that lead to the fulfillment of the vision" (p. 11). The principal is responsible for ensuring that the school environment is conducive to learning and that the highest of

academic standards is expected from students, faculty, and staff (Kaplan & Evans, 1997; Schwahn & Spady, 1998; Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

Several studies have examined principals' experiences during general efforts of restructuring. Though focused on community involvement rather than on takeover processes, Smiley, Crowson, et al. (1994) provided a glimpse at the many challenges facing principals during external change, including, "the persistence of organizational forms and processes which are not conducive to community-school connections" (p. 360) as well as, "a tendency for tried-and-true conventions of school administration to grow in saliency under the competing pressures of community-relations reforms" (p. 361). Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) examined principals during restructuring efforts involving school culture, identifying six strategies used by the principals for improving culture, including developing communication channels, sharing responsibilities and power, and promoting cultural identity. Kaplan and Evans (1997) looked at principals during restructuring in terms of the overall school environment and suggested promoting safety within the school environment, teacher development, and effective communication.

The research specifically addressing principals' perspectives during takeovers is sparse. Existing research (Dimmock, 1999; Koury, 2000; Steyn & Squelch, 1994) includes the examination of principal perspectives during cases of reconstitution, the most extreme form of school takeover. Results from these studies found that principals experienced problems in the areas of managing philosophical differences with central office officials, providing financial management, adjusting to increased workloads, developing curriculum, and establishing communication channels between stakeholders.

In contrast, this study examined principal perspectives during a takeover by an external, state school improvement program, a grave but less extreme form of takeover.

Research Questions

Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, the researcher hoped to uncover the challenges that a principal faced during the first year of the recovery process in an elementary school (grades 3-5) in central Georgia. The overall research questions that guided this study included:

1. What did the principal identify as chief challenges and barriers during the recovery process?
2. How did the principal perceive the intervention of the external state school improvement team?
3. What effects did the recovery process have on the principal over the first year of recovery?
4. How did the principal perceive the state of the school at the end of the first year of recovery?

Significance of the Research

During 2000-2001 in the State of Georgia, no schools were rated as unsatisfactory or failing by the State Department of Education, as there were no means for doing so. Since the passage of the A-Plus Reform Act, the Office of Educational Accountability has been established, and it is this office that will oversee the mandatory external school improvement teams that will be assigned to schools that are rated as unsatisfactory/ failing. Until the Office of Educational Accountability mandates intervention, the only means available to assess low-performing of failing status are through student scores on

the CRCT tests, which lead schools to be labeled as *meets, does not meet,* or *exceeds* standards.

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and issues affecting an elementary principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. The significance of the present study rested on the premise that the identification of key challenges, issues, and barriers to recovery experienced by the principal would afford educational leaders at both the system and site levels in similar situations the opportunity to more easily prepare for, address, and avoid (if possible) similar challenges, issues, and barriers in their own attempts at the recovery of low-performing or failing schools.

Assumptions of the Study

The primary assumption made by the researcher prior to and throughout the study was that the principal was forthright and truthful in the descriptions and in his responses about his experiences with the external, school improvement team, and that he reported the challenges and issues factually. The identification of the challenges and issues faced by the principal might be useful to others encountering similar situations with recovering low-performing schools.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined within the context of this study:

First Year of the Recovery Process- is the period constituting one full school year beginning July 1, 2001 and ending June 30, 2002. For the purposes of the present study, duration of the first year of the recovery process encompassed actions and duties carried out by the principal in his capacity as a recovery agent beginning Fall 2001 and concluding Spring 2002.

Low-performing School- a school in which 50 percent or more of its students' reading and/or math scores are classified as *does not meet expectations* as determined by the CRCT, currently administered to fourth grade students at the elementary level.

Recovery- the attempt to raise the quality of overall student progress at the subject school from the level of *does not meet* to *meets* standards as measured by fourth grade CRCT scores reported by the Georgia Department of Education.

School Improvement Team- the external team assigned to the low-performing school by the Georgia Department of Education at the request of the county superintendent for the purpose of improving student achievement.

Limitations of the Study

The research was limited to the site-specific issues facing a single school and principal. The study was conducted at an urban site located in central Georgia and was selected because the school was in the first year of intervention by an external State Department of Education School Improvement Team. Because the constant presence of the researcher at the school site was impossible, data were limited to that collected through interviews scheduled at specified intervals throughout the duration of the first year of recovery at this school. It is also noted that the present study made no effort to examine the results of the recovery process at the subject school, as recovery is a process that may take several years before yielding its desired results (Fullan, 2001).

This study did not examine or address the effectiveness of the principal, and the present study neither examined the role of teachers or any other staff members in the recovery process, nor did it provide them a voice regarding their perceptions of the principal or the recovery process itself. Rather, the current study focused only on the

principal's perspectives of the challenges and issues he alone faced during the *process* of recovery.

Overview of Research Procedures

In order to develop descriptions of the perspectives of an elementary school principal whose school was voluntarily being assisted by a State of Georgia School Improvement Team, a qualitative case study approach was chosen.

The researcher:

- Interviewed the principal four times during this study;
- Collected and analyzed various artifacts; and,
- Kept fieldnotes throughout the study.

Each interview was audio recorded and then later transcribed. Themes that emerged from the data were coded. Fieldnotes were used as a complement to the participant interviews. The participant was afforded the opportunity to examine the transcripts and to extend ideas and/or to provide clarification on previous statements and the researcher's analysis of data.

The present study examined the challenges and issues affecting an elementary principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. The study's importance lies in the real possibility that the identification of challenges, issues, and barriers to successful recovery in one school might aid educational leaders in planning as they implement new policies and procedures in the recovery of low-performing and failing schools elsewhere. The population of the present study is one. But the lessons of one may well benefit the futures of many.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 included the background and rationale for the present study, including the statement of its purpose. Chapter 2 presented a review of the literature relevant to low-performing and failing schools, their challenges, and the work of principals. Chapter 3 presented the context of the study: the school site, the district, and the community that it serves, as well as the data collection methods and the methods utilized to analyze data collected at the subject site. Chapter 4 reported the data and its analyses. Chapter 5 provided a discussion of the results, including implications for school leaders and principals regarding the challenges and issues one may encounter during the recovery process, as well as implications for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues and challenges an elementary (grades 3-5) school principal faced during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. This chapter examined methods of accountability for low-performing and failing schools, theories of takeover and restructuring interventions, and the work of principals.

A general examination of the principal's work in a school takeover is inherently nebulous, as each individual restructuring situation embodies a number of variables unique to its specific case or setting. The research in each related area lends insight into possible issues and challenges that a principal could encounter while trying to recover a low-performing school. Therefore, it was vital to identify the general and specific factors involved in school takeovers and principal effectiveness to understand better the present study.

Accountability Through Restructuring

The growing movement toward holding schools and systems accountable for student progress is well documented in the existing body of literature (Gratz, 2000; Knowles & Knowles, 2001; Lewis, 2000; Newman, King, & Rigdon, 1996; Olsen, 2001; Rouk, 2000; Underwood, 2001;Walberg, 1997; Ziebarth, 2001).

According to a report by Watts (2001) for the Southern Regional Education Board, major characteristics of accountability systems include strenuous standards for academic content, testing for mastery, professional development consistent with

standards and test results, public reporting of results, and tying results to some action, whether it be rewards, sanctions, or targeted assistance.

Kaplan and Evans (1997) added that any type of successful restructuring revolves around changing "basic assumptions, behaviors, and relationships of people in the school and lead[s] to improved student learning" (p. 3). Similarly, Lashway (1999) argued that accountability systems operate on the premise "that people perform better when they have a clear goal and when their performance has well-defined consequences" (p. 2).

Newmann (1996), writing on behalf of the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was more specific. In the center's analysis of 18 studies concentrating on school restructuring in over 1500 schools in 16 states, Newmann reported three key areas which restructuring programs must address to affect student learning: "authentic pedagogy, school organizational capacity, and external support" (p. 1). However, noticeably missing from the literature, are the perspectives of principals or other site level administrators who are responsible for implementing school restructuring initiatives such as in the recovery of a low-performing school.

Restructuring

Restructuring is a general term describing many different efforts aimed toward school reform. Restructuring can be as simple as a change in the management philosophy of a school (Dimmock, 1999) or as complex as the complete takeover of an entire school (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Newmann and Wehlage (1995) reported, "restructuring has no precise definition, but the term suggests that schooling needs to be comprehensively redesigned; simply improving parts of schools as we know

them isn't enough" (p. 1). Corbett (1990) called restructuring "a conjunctive concept that involves changes in a school districts pattern of rules, roles, relationships, and results" (p. 1). Fennimore (1990) described the ambiguity of the term restructuring:

> National political leaders often use the term in reference to public school choice. At state and district levels, restructuring is often associated with pushing decision-making authority to the local level. Leaders in teachers' unions call restructuring a tool for empowerment. The business community can use the term to describe more active partnerships between businesses and schools. To Community activists, it can mean heightened parent and community involvement. To researchers and practitioners, restructuring is a movement to promote higher order learning outcomes for students. (p. 1)

In short, summarized Fennimore, "restructuring is a term whose meaning varies according to which group is using it" (p. 1).

Weller and Weller (2000) addressed a key component of the philosophy of reengineering, stating "successful school restructuring requires a grassroots change in school governance practices and a cultural transformation" (p. 48). Dreyfuss, Cistone, and Divita (1992) also acknowledged the importance of transformation theory, viewing the transformation of a school's culture, individuals, and roles as vital to the success of restructuring efforts. Blankstein (1993) discussed reengineering as a philosophy of school improvement based on W. Edwards Deming's 14-point philosophy of Total Quality Management (TQM). The principles and concepts of TQM learned from the business sector have been adapted as a school improvement theory (Blankenstein, 1993; Weller and Weller, 2000).

Deming's principals "are powerful, universal axioms based on the assumptions that individuals want to do their best and that it is management's job to enable them to do so by constantly improving the *system* in which they work" (Blankstein, 1993, p. 71,

emphasis in the original). Under this concept, students become the carefully crafted products, parents and the community become customers, teachers become artisans, and principals become managers dedicated to inspiring and empowering everyone to have what they need to succeed. To implement the construct of reengineering in schools today, a paradigm shift is crucial to success because reengineering requires a new way of thinking for the stakeholders involved in school improvement (Blankstein, 1993).

Reflecting on the conclusion of six years experience as a research analyst for the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students in Washington, D. C., Talley (1999) presented six critical factors she noted as necessary for any school reform model to turn around low-performing schools. Tally recommended:

1. a strong, research based literacy curriculum;
2. a significant extra help component;
3. a focus on smallness;
4. a commitment to parental outreach and community building;
5. an ongoing, school-wide program of social skills development; and,
6. a comprehensive, sustained staff development program. (pp.1-2)

Glickman (1993) argued that successful school reform needed to be localized, stating, "We must stop thinking about *national* reform as a way of improving schools. The only reforms that mean much are *local* reforms, in *local* schools and *local* communities" (p.152, emphasis in the original). Fullan (1992) attributed the past failures of many types of reform, including restructuring, to an over-regulation by school systems' central management as well as the failure to involve site-level personnel (e.g. teachers, principals), the real implementers of any school reform effort, in its creation, implementation, and evaluation.

Types of Restructuring

Definitions of restructuring vary widely, illuminating a fundamental problem with restructuring: there is little or no agreement as to its concise definition. Therefore, for the purpose of the present study, restructuring was defined as the attempt to redesign the curriculum of a low-performing school through the mandated intervention of a state school improvement team, for the purpose of improving student achievement.

There are many types of restructuring efforts: vouchers, charter schools, school councils, school improvement teams, a myriad of programs touting different models (e.g., America's Choice), and reconstitution. For the purpose of this study, the present case was compared to the restructuring method of school improvement teams.

The Takeover: An Overview

A substantial body of research (Fullan, 2001; Lewis, 2001; Koury, 2000; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Smiley, Crowson, Chou, & Levin, 1994; U. S. Department of Education, 1998; Wegner & Fulton, 2001; Ziebarth, 2001) specifically addressed the school takeover, an increasingly common method of accountability in which low-performing and failing schools are radically redesigned.

Ziebarth compiled statistics pertaining to takeovers and low-performing schools for 50 states for the Education Commission of the States (2001). At present, 24 states have enacted policies that allow takeovers of school systems, while 15 states have provisions for taking over individual schools "due to academic problems" (p. 2). In 27 states, low-performing schools are required to create and report progress on a school improvement plan. In 18 states, it is the state that creates the plan for each low-performing school and is responsible for measuring progress. Eleven states have the

authority to place low-performing schools on probation. Thirteen states reserve the right to remove accreditation. Four states have provisions for withholding public funds from low-performing schools. Nineteen states implement reconstitution for low-performing schools under different criteria after warnings and probation have failed to trigger a turnaround in a school's performance. Low-performing schools can be closed completely in 10 states, and 15 states have provisions for what is referred to as "hostile school takeovers."

The Georgia Department of Education currently offers school improvement teams as a voluntary option for improving low-performing and failing schools within the State of Georgia, the setting of the current study. With the passage of House Bill 1187 in 2000, commonly known as "A-Plus School Reform," a sweeping testing and accountability system will be in place by 2004 to track Georgia's students. At that time, the implementation of state school improvement teams may become a mandated intervention for low-performing or failing schools that do not show improvement after a probationary period (Office of Educational Accountability, 2001).

Fullan (2001) offered a general rationale for the current movement toward school-based reform: "Success can only happen at the school level, but it also is unlikely to happen on any scale and cannot be sustained if the infrastructure is not dramatically strengthened" (p. 80).

Ziebarth (2001) summarized states' rationale behind takeovers, stating takeovers:

- Are a necessary extension of a state's constitutional responsibilities
- Provide a good opportunity for state and local decision makers to combine resources and knowledge to improve children's learning
- Allow a competent executive staff to guide an uninterrupted and effective implementation of school improvement efforts

- Are a catalyst for creating the right environment for the community to address a school district's problems
- Allow for more radical, and necessary, changes in low-performing school districts
- Use achievement data collected from school districts and schools to bolster accountability efforts. (p. 2)

Feldman (2000) suggested that the only effective way to fix failing schools is to close them, reopen them the following year with new programs, leadership, and "a negotiated change in the mix of staff" (p. 5).

Criteria for Takeovers: Testing

A variety of instruments are used to determine a school's academic progress, "including norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, performance assessments, and some evaluating attendance and dropouts" (Rouk, 2000, p. 1). Kohn (2001) argued that achievement test scores are an inappropriate means for assessing student progress, suggesting that socioeconomic status plays a more significant role in variances in student scores. Kohn asserted that testing to the entire national reform movement should be an anathema in that, "We are facing what I think can be called an educational emergency in this country. The irony is that the emergency has been created in large part—or at least exacerbated—in the name of raising standards" (Lindsay, 2000, p. 230). Although research (Gratz, 2000; Knowles & Knowles, 2001; Maher & Maher, 1996; Olsen, 2001; Reeves, 2001) points to the unsoundness of the use of standardized testing as a lone measure of student achievement, standardized testing remains the primary source to measure academic achievement for countless children nationwide (U. S. Department of Education, 1998).

With the passage of the A-Plus Education Reform Act of 2000 in Georgia, the newly created Office of Educational Accountability has begun the process of implementing a five-year timeline during which benchmark tests and end-of-course tests will be added to the current system of assessment using only the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). By school year 2004-2005, the Office of Accountability is scheduled to have implemented the Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program-Revised (GKAP-R) for all kindergarten students, the CRCT for all students in grades 1-8, End-of-Course tests for all high school students. Moreover, schools and school systems will be held accountable publicly to their constituents through the publishing and distribution of report cards for every school in the State of Georgia (Office of Educational Accountability, 2001).

Takeovers by Reconstitution: The Extreme

The two most common types of takeovers are reconstitution and the implementation of school improvement teams (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). Though definitions vary across states, reconstitution in its strictest sense involves redesigning a school by dismissing all administrators, teachers, and staff, and starting over with new leadership, staff, and a new educational approach. Although "the term reconstitution lacks a precise common meaning" (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, p. 45), often the only aspects of the school left intact are the students and the school building itself. Orfield, quoted by Hendrie (1996) likened reconstitution to "open heart surgery. It's a very, very dramatic kind of intervention, the most radical form of urban education reform there is" (p. 1).

Reconstitution is the most powerful form of school sanctioning exercised by states. Reconstitution in its current form was first implemented by the San Francisco Unified School District in 1983 (Rozmus, 1998). Currently, 19 states have in place a provision allowing state mandated reconstitution for low-performing and failing schools. Still, reconstitution is a last resort available to states and usually is not implemented until after low-performing schools have failed to show improvement after having been placed on probationary status and offered additional state assistance (Ziebarth, 2001). Schools are usually target for reconstitution due to poor performance in state school achievement tests (NEA, 1999).

In 1999, members of the nation's largest teachers' union were surveyed by the National Education Association (NEA). The NEA found that the majority of its responding members supported reconstitution as a means for school improvement in some situations, but that more than 25 percent of respondents who had participated in reconstitution efforts "were unaware that their schools had been pinpointed as lowperforming [sic]—and 22 percent said their school shake-up came as 'a complete shock'"(p. 23). In the same survey, "most members reported that reconstitution brought extra assistance and professional development opportunities. But only 46 percent said their schools saw improvement in achievement" (p. 23). Although the report made no claims as to the validity of the survey, the results suggested attention needed to be focused on the concerns of teachers during the reconstitution process.

Advocates of reconstitution believe that the threat of reconstitution alone is often enough to motivate low-performing schools and those on probationary status to find ways of increasing student achievement, while detractors call reconstitution, "a faulty strategy

that blames teachers for school failure while doing little to solve the underlying problems that contribute to low performance" (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, p. 46).

Though most studies on reconstitution are limited to informative summaries of locations where it has been implemented, other research studies on reconstitution have documented various forms of success in its implementation mainly through qualitative research (Goldstein, Keleman, & Koski, 1998; Orfield, 1992; Rojas, 1996). In a legal case study, Rozmus (1998) summarized the implementation of reconstitution in San Francisco over a 15-year period from a standpoint of case law supplemented by qualitative interview data. Rozmus identified difficulties in agreement on the base of authority (school based vs. system based) in reconstituted schools as well as varied reports of degrees of successful implementation across school sites.

Through interview data, Rozmus (1998) summarized suggestions made by principals, central office staff, and teachers. Suggestions from the superintendent's standpoint were related to a need for increased staff development. Central office staff was positive about reconstitution, but suggested partial reconstitution in future efforts. School-based leaders welcomed the opportunity to begin fresh and were positive about the additional programs offered their schools during the reconstitution effort, but they noted problems with the retention of experienced teachers. According to Rozmus (1998), teachers reported feelings of being left out of the process. Acknowledging the reported successes of reconstitution at many school sites, Rozmus' recommended a greater system effort to include all stakeholders in the reconstitution process rather than initiating reconstitution as a top-down system of management. Rozmus also suggested increased staff development and a greater emphasis on teamwork.

Koury (2000) examined reconstitution in San Francisco from the view of three principals of reconstituted schools. Using qualitative data gathered through interviews, observations, and a review of documents at each site, Koury identified principals' "theories of action" (p. iv) regarding the reconstitution. Koury identified common theories of action. Principals:

1. hired diverse faculty and staff;
2. held high expectations for students and staff;
3. had clear standards for academics and behavior;
4. awarded public recognition for student successes;
5. supported bilingual programs;
6. implemented peer support systems among staff;
7. standardized curricula;
8. gathered the support of community and parent involvement; and,
9. placed a strong emphasis on student achievement.

In Georgia, the setting of the present study, reconstitution has not been implemented to date and currently is not being considered for future implementation, although the Georgia Department of Education, already charged with providing voluntary school improvement teams, is analyzing additional methods of assisting chronically low-performing and failing schools (Office of Educational Accountability, 2001).

Takeovers by School Improvement Teams: The Last Chance

The two most common types of takeovers are reconstitution and the implementation of school improvement teams (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). At first impression, the concept of state school improvement teams appears to be a friendly

opportunity for school based staff development. But in reality, the arrival of a state school improvement team at a school site is a silent takeover of whatever part of the school operation that the team is charged with repairing. The state school improvement team is a powerful entity with sweeping powers at the school site. In many states, the school improvement team is often the last chance for the low-performing or failing school to begin showing progress toward a turnaround in student achievement. Staff and school leadership are often left in place while the team persuasively implements any of a variety of models designed to coax the school back from the brink of outright reconstitution (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Numerous states have provisions for this type of takeover intervention. Kentucky implemented the School Transformation and Renewal Program (STAR), a mandated school improvement concept in which a "distinguished educator" is assigned to develop a stepwise action plan for the low-performing school. Teams of staff members are assigned to concentrate on the improvement of each academic area. Michigan assists low-performing schools through evaluative services and district level support teams (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). North Carolina mandated state Assistance Teams, composed of teachers and staff, college representatives, administrators, and others assigned by the state school board to help low-performing schools reevaluate their academic approaches and develop local school improvement plans (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2001).

New York sponsors school intervention through the creation of groups of stakeholders charged with assisting low-performing schools to develop comprehensive school-wide redesign plans. New York also offers teams made up of the local

superintendent, teachers, board of education members, parents, union representatives, and experienced educators, who spend four days at each low-performing school evaluating its programs. The group presents its findings to the school district, which then mandates a corrective action plan, designed in accordance with the findings. The Miami-Dade County Public School System offers Operation Safety Net, a program through which low-performing schools are mandated to implement a school-wide reading program. The district then provides increased technology and other resources in support of the program (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). In Chicago, consistently low-performing schools were "required to take immediate corrective actions and to be monitored by a specially designated improvement team" (Stunard, 1997, p. 775) composed of educators, consultants, and community participants with a vested interest in the success of the low-performing school.

The Georgia Department of Education offers school improvement teams, comprised of nine professional staff from the School Improvement Team office and staff from Regional Educational Support Agencies (RESAs). These teams "provide services that encourage, facilitate and assist schools and systems in designing, implementing and evaluating efforts to improve student learning" (Georgia Department of Education, 2001, p. 1). The key difference between the assistance teams in aforementioned states and those in Georgia is that Georgia state school improvement teams are voluntary and are used only when local systems request them (Georgia Department of Education, 2001).

America's Choice: A School Improvement Team Model

School Improvement Teams in Georgia currently offer the America's Choice model for school improvement to systems that request assistance in restructuring low-

performing and failing schools. America's Choice is a school improvement model designed by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) "to support and develop standards and assessments" (American Institutes for Research, 2001, p.1). The model focuses on student performance in five areas: "Standards and assessments, learning environments, community services and support, high-performance management, and public and parent engagement" (p. 1). Development of the model was initiated in 1992. The program was formalized in 1998. According to the NCEE, 300 schools in 14 states were implementing the program as of 1998.

The American Institutes for Research (2001) reported, "as a schoolwide approach, America's Choice is relatively new, and rigorous research on student achievement outcomes is not yet available. No publicly available research studies use rigorous methodology to critically evaluate outcomes of the approach" (p. 2). Although four studies have been completed by independent researchers, the American Institutes for Research noted, "there were no studies on which to base conclusions about the effectiveness of America's Choice" (p. 2).

According to statements by the program's creator, the National Center on Education and the Economy (2001), America's Choice places a heavy emphasis on the development of literacy in the early grades, focusing on phonics, both guided and independent reading and writing, and oral language.

Principal Perspectives of School Improvement Teams

Spilman (1995) addressed his own experiences in a self-reported case study describing his role as the principal of Canton Middle School, a low-performing school that hosted a School Leadership Team with the backing of the Maryland State

Department of Education. The team was composed of "parents, community members, central office personnel, and every team and administrative entity in the school" (p. 35). The team conducted comprehensive assessments, then created a teacher led program charged with modifying "organizational structure, curriculum, supplemental programs, operational matters, roles, and the decision-making process" (p. 35).

Challenges noted by Spilman included a tedious process of curriculum redesign as well as a change in management structure from a top-down to a bottom-up model in which the principal's role became that of facilitator. Spilman emphasized the importance of communication, shared governance, and continuous evaluation by the site-based School Improvement Team.

Section Summary

There is a growing movement nationwide toward holding schools accountable for student progress. Restructuring is a general term describing many different efforts aimed toward school reform. Though the variety of definitions for the term are numerous, restructuring is generally viewed in terms of changing the structure, philosophy, curriculum, and management of low-performing and failing schools. The most popular specific means of restructuring are through a.) reconstitution, the most powerful form of school sanctioning exercised by states; and, b.) school improvement teams, in which external consultants play a lead role in the transformation of the school.

There are a variety of methods under which school improvement teams are implemented, but most call for the extensive involvement of members of the school staff, administration, parents, community leaders, and central office personnel in the

transformational process. Together, these stakeholders share in the rebuilding of the low-performing or failing school.

Schools are taken over or restructured for the purpose of improving student achievement. The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and issues facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. In the present case, a decision to implement a restructuring model, America's Choice, was made by the local superintendent of schools, who requested assistance from a state School Improvement Team. The school's status as one that *does not meet* state standards represented the criteria for the implementation of the School Improvement Team, the method of restructuring in the present case.

A Case for the Philosophy of Recovery

Problems with Universal Terms

Terms used to describe concepts in education have a habit of being vague. A glance at the myriad definitions used to describe the few key concepts related to the present study illustrated this point. The problem with universal terms lies in the fact that there are many, but the terms hold no true definitions.

For example, the term restructuring has been defined as a change in the management philosophy of a school (Dimmock, 1999); as the complete takeover of an entire school (U.S. Department of Education, 1998); or even as "a conjunctive concept that involves changes in a school district's pattern of rules, roles, relationships, and results" (Corbett, 1990, p. 1). Newmann and Wehlage (1995) admitted "restructuring has no precise definition," then proceeded to add another to the fray, claiming "but the term suggests that schooling needs to be comprehensively redesigned; simply improving parts

of schools as we know them isn't enough" (p. 1). Fennimore (1990) reminded researchers that "restructuring is a term whose meaning varies according to which group is using it" (p. 1).

An analysis of the term principal yields similar results. Principal was defined simply as the instructional leader of a school by one (DeBevoise, 1990), while others (Sebring & Bryk, 2000) presented an more complex definition by stating four traits the authors believed the principal should possess: "an inclusive, facilitative orientation; an institutional focus on student learning; efficient management; and a reliance on a combination of pressure and support to motivate others" (p. 441).

Some researchers told us what a principal is not, "no longer the 'rulers' of small kingdoms," (Calabrese, Zepeda, & Fine, 1998, p. 85) only to then describe what they view principals should be: instructional leaders, team facilitators, and consensus builders, in addition to the traditional tasks of overseeing daily school operations.

Others (Finn & Kanstoroom, 2000) hinged the success of school reform on the principal assuming the role of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and having "the real authority… (p. 69)" while Dimmock (1999) indicated an effective principal was one who encouraged his staff to think outside of the box. DeBevoise (1990) stated, "principals are expected to be instructional leaders but generally lack the time and training to assume such a role" (p. 1), simultaneously telling us what the principal is and is not.

Some researchers (Leonard & Leonard, 1991) identified the principal as "the most widely identified source of leadership in implementing new programs or teaching practices" (p. 239), while other researchers (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) argued that principal effectiveness has little effect on student achievement.

The same point can be illustrated with just about any concept in education (or in any other field of scientific inquiry, for that matter). Upon viewing the first fire, millennia ago, perhaps the first caveman grunted, "Ulch!" while his companion grunted, "Oobee!" and still another added, "Yowzee!" Silly? Perhaps. True? Absolutely. Consider the following definition of semantics: "the meaning, or the interpretation of the meaning, of a word, sign, sentence, etc: Example: Let's not argue about semantics" (Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, 2001). The number of definitions that can be used to describe any term is limited only to the number of interpretations of the term: probably infinite. That is the problem with language.

Applied to educational research pertaining to principals and schools, the number of possible definitions for each term (principals and schools) are limited only by the number of principals, schools, or combinations of principals and schools on the planet multiplied by the number of interpretations that could exist regarding those principals and schools.

Recovery

Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (1996) defined recovery as:

> 1. The act or power of regaining, retaking, or conquering again; a recovering or reclaiming… 2. a getting well again, coming or bringing back to consciousness, revival of a person from weakness, etc. 3. a regaining of balance, of former position or condition, etc.; a return to soundness. 4. the time needed for recovering. (p. 987)

The field of mental health offers a variety of viewpoints on the issue of recovery. A report issued by the Office of the United States Surgeon General (Department of Health and Human Services, 1999) detailed many aspects of recovery, acknowledging "recovery is variously called a process, an outlook, a vision, [and] a guiding principal,"

but further stated, "the overarching message is that hope and restoration of a meaningful life are possible, despite serious mental illness" (p. 97). The report added, "instead of focusing primarily on symptom relief, as the medical model dictates, recovery casts a much wider spotlight on restoration of self-esteem and identity and on attaining meaningful roles in society" (p. 97).

Survivors of mental illness defined recovery as "living a full life in the context of one's mental illness/disability… recovery does not mean being symptom-free but does mean living with hope" (National Summit of Mental Health Consumers and Survivors, 2001, p. 1). The research of Leete (1989) and Long (1994) also stressed the importance of the element of hope. In his examination of recovery among sufferers of schizophrenia, Leete stated, "having some hope is crucial to recovery; none of us would strive if we believed it to be a futile effort" (p. 32).

Deeghan (1988) described the recovery process as:

> A way of life, an attitude, and a way of approaching the day's challenges. It is not a perfectly linear process. At times our course is erratic and we falter, slide back, regroup and start again. The need is to meet the challenge of the disability and to reestablish a new and valued sense of integrity and purpose within and beyond the limits of the disability. (p. 15)

Sufferers of alcoholism often define recovery as "the process of maintaining abstinence from alcohol or drugs and regaining physical and psychological health. The process of regaining sanity and serenity" (About.com, p.1).

Additional fields also described recovery within their own contexts. Medical research (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2001) examining recovery in stroke victims defined the process of recovery as including the "treatment, spontaneous recovery, rehabilitation, and the return to community living" (p. 2). A common

definition from within the behavioral health field of family counseling stated, "Recovery is finding new meaning for living without the fear of future abandonment" (Family Counseling Agency, 2002). One definition from the legal field described recovery as "the restoration of a former right, by the solemn judgement of a Court of Justice" (Lectric Law Library, 2001).

The field of emergency management uses different definitions of recovery to describe its work. Two basic definitions described recovery as "what you do after an emergency to return to your normal life style and to make yourself safer" (Tillamook County Emergency Management, 2001), and "the assisting of persons and communities affected by emergencies to achieve a proper and effective level of functioning" (Victoria Department of Human Services, 1998). The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (2001) defined recovery as those:

> Activities traditionally associated with providing federal supplemental disaster relief assistance under a presidential major disaster declaration. [Recovery] includes individual and public assistance programs that provide temporary housing assistance, as well as grants and loans to eligible individuals and government entities to recover from the effects of a disaster. (p.1)

Research from the field of environmental philosophy discusses a construct similar to the notion of recovery, in which damaged ecosystems are returned to a state of health and well-being. Identified within the field of environmental philosophy as restoration, Light (2002) identified the importance of a return to a state of health and well-being as encompassing not just the restoration effort, but also the relationship between humans and the ecosystems around them during the effort. Light emphasized that "a good restoration must maximize the degree of public participation" (p. 4). This includes

hands-on involvement of all stakeholders in each aspect of restoration efforts, including planning, implementation, and maintenance.

The use of the term recovery within the field of education has been virtually non-existent, with an exception being in the Texas school system, where recovery has been used to describe alternative schools charged with assisting students displaying health risk behaviors (Weller, Tortolero, et al., 1999).

Why *Recovery?*

The problem with restructuring as it applies to education is that the term is too vague. Restructuring sounds like something one does when building a house. The term often applies to other fields, such as computer database technology, portfolio management, and the field of sausage making. Restructuring is also impersonal. It brings to mind mechanical manipulations of inanimate objects.

Does the term recovery have as many opportunities for disparity in its definitions as the term restructuring? Certainly. However, the premise of recovery lies in direct contrast to the cold, mechanical, and industrial connoting term restructuring. Recovery is used more often qualitatively than it is used quantitatively. Recovery is usually human-centered. Recovery as outlined in definitions from substance abuse, medical, and addictive literature, brings to one's mind a seriousness: a sense of gravity. The education of our children needs to be viewed in the same way.

No matter how one chooses to define it specifically, recovery connotes healing and a return to health, which is exactly what improving the education systems dealing with our children deserves. Many of our schools are sick. This view contrasts with the

opinions of Berliner and Biddle (1995) and Maher and Maher (1996), who pose that education is largely no different now than in past years.

When discussing specific reform movements that apply directly to the education of children, why not use a term that perhaps better describes the nature of the work of intervention efforts to recover, or to make better, systems that are failing in their missions to work effectively with children? In this context, efforts such as reconstitution— a term that " lacks a precise common meaning" (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, p. 45) — and school improvement team interventions are types of recovery efforts. Recovery puts these interventions in humanistic terms. Rationale for a movement toward the philosophy of recovery over restructuring during the reform of low-performing and failing schools is perhaps best exemplified in a quote by philosopher Carl Jung, in which he stated, "We cannot live in the afternoon of life according to the program of life's morning; for what was great in the morning will be little at evening."

Section Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. In the case of the present study, recovery was defined, as the attempt to raise the quality of overall student progress at the subject school from the level of *does not meet* to *meets* standards as measured by fourth grade CRCT scores reported by the Georgia Department of Education. Recovery included the creation of a positive, achievement based, mutually nurturing, learning environment where the individual needs of students were met.

The construct of Recovery is based on research from the fields of mental health, emergency management, medicine, law, and environmental philosophy. Though the term recovery lacks a universal definition, the underlying premise holds that recovery encompasses a healing, and a return to a state of health and well-being. The construct of recovery presented in this study holds that repairing low-performing and failing schools for the purpose of educating children deserves the same approach.

The Principal

Early research on school leadership (Fayol, 1949; Taylor, 1911; Weber, 1946) emphasized top-down management in which the role of the school leader was essentially hierarchical in nature (Leonard & Leonard, 1992). Twenty-first Century leadership looks much different. Modern principals are "no longer the 'rulers' of small kingdoms" (Calabrese, Zepeda, & Fine, 1998, p.85), but must serve their schools as instructional leaders, team facilitators, and consensus builders, in addition to the traditional tasks of overseeing daily school operations.

As instructional leader, the principal is responsible for ensuring that competent staff are effectively teaching the chosen curriculum and that students are learning it to the extent that they are making academic progress (Association of Washington School Administrators, 1999; Carlin, 1992; Schwahn & Spady, 1998).

What makes a principal successful? Several studies (elaborated below) have addressed traits of successful principals (Calabrese & Zepeda, 1996; Kaplan & Evans, 1997; Schwan & Spady, 1998; Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Different researchers emphasized different characteristics important to principal success, which was not surprising, as site-specific circumstances demand a myriad of different traits from principals seeking

success. Still, there appeared to be several common traits that emerged throughout the literature.

Blase and Blase (2001) examined effective instructional leadership from the teacher's perspective, asking 809 teachers to describe what principals' characteristics most influenced instruction. Two themes emerged to explain the relationship between principals' characteristics and principals' influence on instruction. Principals who were effective instructional leaders 1) "talked with teachers to promote reflection" and, 2) "promot[ed] professional growth" (p. 22). Other traits of effective instructional leadership noted by teachers included avoiding the use of intimidation, supporting teacher choice and growth, creating situations for constructive dialogue on issues, and "embracing growth, change, and risk taking" (p. 22). Whaley and Hegstrom (1992) studied the relationship between perceptions of school principals' effectiveness in communication and teacher job satisfaction. The authors analyzed survey data gathered from 133 teachers in California. The findings addressed the importance of effective principal communication, identifying a significant relationship between how teachers perceive a principal's communication and their job satisfaction.

Vision

A keen sense of vision is a key characteristic of successful principals (Hultgren & Reidlinger, 1996; Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Weller and Weller (2000) agreed with the importance of a unified school vision, but warned that principals who develop a vision alone "rarely succeed, and if successful, their success is short-lived" (p. 30). The authors posed that effective school vision must be unified, school-wide, and created with the input of all stakeholders for it to be successful. Weller and Weller defined vision as "a

'dream,' a mental image of a possible, desirable, and attainable future" (p. 30). Bennis and Nanus (1985) earlier added, "vision articulates a view of a realistic, credible, attractive future for the organization" (p. 89).

Calabrese and Zepeda (1999) recognized the importance of the principal's vision, but cautioned that success does not come solely through vision, but rather through vision combined with good decision-making abilities. The authors stated, "any vision is useless unless the principal understands how to make decisions that lead to the fulfillment of the vision" (p. 11).

Out with the Old…

A key report from the U.S. Department of Education (1998) outlined the importance of the principal's role to school success, while recognizing common faults in principal selection:

> Strong principals who act as instructional leaders are important to school success, but principals often are placed in their roles with little attention to their instructional skills. Many districts strongly emphasize the principal's administrative responsibilities, from organizing the school's bus routes and schedules to handling personnel issues. To the extent that principals are able to focus their work on improving student instruction, students will benefit. (p. 26)

As early as 1982, DeBevoise also recognized the existence of obstacles to some principals' abilities as instructional leaders, reporting, "principals are expected to be instructional leaders but generally lack the time and training to assume such a role" (p. 1). The aforementioned two studies support the need for staff development for principals regarding their roles as instructional leaders.

In the age of school accountability, Gallegos (2000) noted the lack of job security for the principal whose school's performance is lagging, observing that when test scores fall or remain at unacceptable levels, principals are replaced. Carlin (1992) agreed, saying that the principal is "more accountable than teachers because he or she can be removed from the position more easily" (p. 48).

Contrasting research (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) argued that principal effectiveness has little effect on student achievement. Pointing toward the complexity of the issue, Davis (1998) asked 99 superintendents in California to report central reasons why principals left their jobs involuntarily. The top five reasons were ranked by frequency of response. The failure to communicate and build human relationships was the overwhelming factor reported by superintendents, followed by failure to make good decisions, failure to build a support base, failure in management of "diverse political demands" (p. 74), and failure to build confidence and trust.

According to Davis' findings, the failure to increase student achievement did not rank among the top five reasons for principal termination, possibly indicating either student achievement was not a factor in terminations in 1998, or that poor interpersonal relationships tended to sink principals before achievement had the chance. Regardless, the principal is the employee most widely held accountable for the lack of student achievement within schools (Carlin, 1992).

A key issue during many types of restructuring in which one principal replaces another is the handling of the transition. Peterson and Solstrud (1996) suggested principals pay attention to the possibility of employee alienation during transition, stating, "principals appointed to restructuring schools may need to monitor closely how

they are taking on power so that staff leaders continue to feel empowered," adding, "Nonetheless, tensions will exist during the transition" (p. 107).

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. The identification of the issues and challenges facing the principal in the present case may assist principal selection committees in selecting candidates best prepared for similar challenges in schools attempting similar efforts toward recovery.

Managing Change

Key factors facing individuals during any type of change include anxiety, struggle, and loss, often leaving participants with feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence (Fullan, 1991; Zepeda, 1999). Weller (1998) suggested methods by which leaders can reduce change anxiety, stating, "wide participation is needed in planning, designing, and implementing change," and, "participants build ownership and commitment by expressing ideas and incorporating them into the change process" (p. 62).

One of six themes Peterson and Solstrud (1996) observed in an analysis of six restructured schools indicates "a clear and shared mission and purpose can increase feelings of commitment, levels of conflict, and attention to restructuring" (p. 106). However, the authors cautioned, "principals are important to restructuring efforts, but not all the time" (p. 106).

In a study of two schools undergoing change, Hultgren and Redlinger (1996) summarized common elements of change and improvement in student learning, which included shared vision, a climate of collegiality, positive conflict, and professional growth. The study yielded areas of particular interest to principals managing change. The

authors emphasized the need for time to allow change to establish itself as well as the importance of trust, stating, "change occurs when individuals understand and embrace the need for something different than what has existed" (p. 18).

The Work of the Principal in Restructuring

When Leonard and Leonard (1991) collected qualitative survey data asking teachers to indicate which person(s) they felt had the largest impact in teaching or new program implementation, the school principal was "the most widely identified source of leadership in implementing new programs or teaching practices" (p. 239).

Calabrese, Zepeda, and Fine (1998) looked at themes surfacing in the Chicago educational reform movement, finding the principal's role in restructuring to be changing from autocratic isolation to one requiring inclusion and participation from community groups, school councils, and parents while following strict guidelines for accountability to the local school board.

Sebring and Bryk (2000) also studied principals in Chicago during eight years of the city's massive reform movement in an effort to identify the characteristics of principals of productive schools. They identified three common areas mastered by principals of productive schools: leadership style, strategies employed, and issues emphasized. Regarding leadership styles of successful principals, the authors noted, "an inclusive, facilitative orientation; an institutional focus on student learning; efficient management; and a reliance on a combination of pressure and support to motivate others" (p. 441). Important strategies employed by successful principals included beginning their tenures by dealing with problems which could be solved quickly; fostering a sustained emphasis on core instruction; paying careful attention to intervention follow-up; and

mobilizing teachers, parents, and community members to back a common plan for school success.

Sebring and Bryk (2000) noted that principals of productive schools openly embraced key issues such as community and parent involvement through school councils, commitment to teacher development, and coordination of efforts between the school and other public entities such as hospitals and libraries. Research by Webster (1996) supported each of these key issues as vital for principal effectiveness in the restructured school, but added the importance of principals promoting teacher empowerment, also a key finding of Blase and Blase's (2001) research.

Finn and Kanstoroom (2000) hinged the success of school reform on the principal assuming the role of a CEO, having "the real authority to select promising candidates from a diverse pool, assess their classroom strengths and weaknesses, ensure that they receive whatever training they need to be effective, and replace bad teachers with good ones" (p. 69). Kaplan and Evans (1997) examined the principal's role in addressing the total school environment during restructuring after studying faculty survey data in a high school in VA, suggesting an emphasis on:

1. the improvement of the physical plant for a safer and more productive school environment;
2. teacher development through strong roles of lead teachers, with lead teachers and the principal together forming a critical mass dedicated to student achievement; and,
3. open door communication to establish and perpetuate trust among the faculty and administration.

Still, the authors emphasized that any successful attempt at restructuring must ultimately focus on "the school culture-beliefs about what teachers and students do and how they do it" (Kaplan and Evans, 1997, p. 8).

Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) examined the role of the principal in restructuring from the standpoint of school culture, highlighting important strategies that effective principals employed to influence culture. These included strengthening the culture within the school, using bureaucracy to reinforce the changed culture, emphasizing staff development, communicating cultural beliefs and values, sharing responsibilities and power, and promoting cultural identity by using symbols unique to the culture.

Schools are taken over for the purpose of improving student achievement. Delaney (1997) stated, "The leadership style of the school principal is the primary factor contributing to a successful relationship between school-based management and school improvement" (p. 107). Wallace (1991) concluded, "principals' beliefs and values affect not only the restructuring itself but also their influence [and] perceptions about whether or when to implement it to maximize what they perceive to be the benefits or to minimize negative effects" (p. 197).

Principals' Perspectives of Issues and Challenges During Restructuring

Steyn and Squelch (1994) conducted one of the few studies directly examining the perspectives of principals during restructuring of their schools in South Africa during post-apartheid school reform. Using qualitative methodology and interview data from three principals, the authors found that during restructuring, principals reported a change in their roles in which they experienced increased workloads and the addition of more tasks. Added responsibilities during this episode of school restructuring included

financial management (as schools were now responsible for managing and collecting school fees from parents), strategic planning, and "new situations that called for more participative management and decision-making skills" (p. 185).

Under restructuring, principals reported concerns about staff members, such as strong feelings of uncertainty with regard to their careers and responsibilities and increased pressure from parents for student achievement. Obstacles noted by principals during restructuring included being forced to phase out subjects such as Latin due to financial constraints, larger class size, and a strong potential for problems in communication. The principals noted that the "system, parents, governing bodies, teachers, principals, and even pupils [had] been confronted with challenges and unforeseen problems for which they were ill prepared" (p. 189).

Though the setting and circumstances of the restructuring effort were much different from the effort examined in the present study, the work of Steyn and Squelch (1994) provided an example of the issues and challenges principals faced in the areas of curriculum, finances, class-size, and communication during one case of school restructuring in South Africa.

Dimmock (1999) presented a case study similar to this study in which he used qualitative interview data to analyze the specific dilemmas faced by one principal during school restructuring at a site in Western Australia. He defined dilemmas as, "situations, which force either/or choices to be made," stating, "dilemmas are intractable situations which lend themselves to management rather than solution" (p. 97). Dimmock acknowledged the limited body of research, stating, "there is a dearth of in-depth studies which attempt to connect specific dilemmas with their management and resultant

outcomes and effects" (p. 97). Dimmock (1999) added, "relatively little attention has to date been given to how principals cope with and manage their dilemmas, and to the further issue of the effects and outcomes of such management" (p. 97).

While the present study examined issues and challenges faced during one type of restructuring effort (recovery) rather than dilemmas as defined by Dimmock, the concepts underlying both Dimmock's and the present case study— the investigation of principals' experiences during the process of school restructuring— were very similar. The studies differed somewhat in that Dimmock sought to identify those problems deemed unsolvable using his definition of dilemmas as well as methods of addressing those dilemmas, while the present studied sought simply to identify the issues and challenges faced by the subject principal during the restructuring effort.

The principal studied by Dimmock (1999) was described as an enthusiastic visionary who embraced the restructuring effort, who led with a, "humanistic, caring approach" (p. 101), and who inspired staff to work toward the school's main goal: student-centered learning. The main goal of the restructuring effort was a move from central, top-down management to site-based management. The principal encouraged his staff to think outside of the box when searching for solutions to problems.

The challenges Dimmock's (1999) principal faced were most often linked to different philosophies of program implementation between the principal and system management and what essentially became a power struggle between the principal and school system management. Even though the restructuring effort was intended to place more responsibility and decision-making authority within the schools, the principal

consistently encountered "bureaucratic, hierarchical, and top-down" (p. 105) resistance from system managers.

Dimmock (1999) identified several situations in which the principal found and secured creative ways to resolve site-based dilemmas for which the system offered no solution, only to have the system management intervene and resist the implementation of the principal's creative solutions. There was little clarity within the restructuring policy— in this case site-based management— regarding which decisions were to be left to creative site-based management vs. which decisions were to be dictated by the system. For effective leadership to take place, the principal was forced to "first reconceptualize [dilemmas] in terms of core values and visions held," then reinterpret dilemmas "to allow for practical implementation" (p. 99).

While the aim of restructuring in the present study was the recovery of a low-performing school rather than one moving toward site-based management, Dimmock's (1999) research identified some possible challenges regarding central office intervention in a principal's school-based decision-making and attempts at problem-solving during restructuring.

Koury (2000) studied principals' perspectives of reconstitution at three schools in San Francisco. Using qualitative methodology through interviews, observations, and a review of school records, she analyzed the actions of the subject principals during mandated reconstitution, finding:

> The principals took many similar actions: they hired a diverse staff to foster cultural understanding; they emphasized respect and dignity; they recognized students publicly of academic achievement; they set high standards while putting supports in place to help students meet those standards; they extended the school day or year; they encouraged peer tutoring and conflict

> management, they emphasized teacher responsibility; they encouraged the arts; they standardized curriculum across subjects; and they went to great lengths to engage parents. The study also found that the principals first looked at the broader picture and [the] 'feel' of the school, then tended to use the following types of evidence to measure student success: Student achievement, student, behavior, school climate, school offerings, and student, parent, and teacher testimonials. (p. iv)

Koury (2000) identified several obstacles faced by principals during mandated school change that are relevant to this case study:

1. The principals noted a lack of time to handle all of the issues faced; "personal toll … on their health and their energy" (p. 141);
2. paperwork required during the restructuring process;
3. "trying to push the bureaucracy while simultaneously trying to change the [school's] culture" (p. 141); and,
4. problems with the teacher's union. (p. 141)

Though the present study examined solely the issues and challenges the principal faced rather than the principal's specific actions during the process, Koury's study lends relevant insight into the obstacles principals encounter during restructuring.

Section Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. Key issues shown in the work of successful principals are vision and change management. Principals have been shown to be vital to the success of the schools with whose care they have been charged. Characteristics of effective principals include fostering effective communication and active involvement among all stakeholders within the organization, creating a focus on student learning, sharing responsibilities and power, being efficient managers, and possessing the ability to motivate others.

Additional studies (Dimmock, 1999; Koury, 2000; Steyn & Squelch, 1994) suggested that principals face myriad challenges during the restructuring of failing schools beyond those challenges facing principals of successful schools. Specific challenges for the principal during restructuring efforts include dealing with dilemmas, time constraints, changes in workload, difficulties with communication, decision-making authority, union related issues, personal pressures, and differences in philosophies of implementation, among others.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the present study was to examine the issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. Although limited research (Dimmock, 1999; Koury, 2000; Steyn & Squelch, 1994) examined these challenges directly, a wider body of research discussed key components related to the present study: restructuring, recovery, and the work of principals. Accountability is a reality in the 21st Century and usually involves the examination of scores on student achievement tests (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). For schools whose students fail to meet a variety of state criteria on achievement test scores, a nationwide movement has emerged charged with the reform of low-performing and failing schools, the most severe method of which is by means of school takeovers (Ziebarth, 2000).

Recovery has been defined in a variety of qualitative ways across the fields of medicine, mental health, rehabilitative medicine, and addiction. Definitions from these fields identified recovery as having qualities pertaining to healing, rehabilitation, reclamation, "the return to community living," (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2001) and the restoration of hope. In short, recovery is a philosophy.

The researcher chose to view the present effort through the construct of *recovery* rather than restructuring, the most common method term used in describing school improvement efforts, because recovery more accurately describes the healing process that characterizes the needs of both schools in crisis and the children whom they serve. Though limited in quantity, existing research (Dimmock, 1999; Koury, 2000; Steyn & Squelch, 1994) suggested principals who manage low-performing or failing schools during restructuring efforts face many issues and challenges in the process, including difficulties managing communication, sizeable workloads, and preserving the role of the school as an independent learning environment.

The aforementioned research speaks directly to the importance of the present study, which examined the issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. Accountability is sweeping through schools and systems nationwide. Many low-performing and failing schools are being taken over through restructuring for the purpose of improving student achievement. The two most common methods of takeovers through restructuring are reconstitution and the implementation of school improvement teams.

This study might benefit those encountering similar situations of restructuring. The present study might also benefit interview committees in selecting personnel to become principals of low-performing and failing schools. The identification of specific issues and challenges a new principal might encounter during recovery could assist interview committees to selection of principals whom they feel would best handle those issues and challenges.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school in central Georgia. To accomplish this purpose, a series of four interviews with the principal were conducted at approximately six-week intervals throughout the 2001-2002 school year. The interviews were designed to seek the principal's perspectives regarding his experiences during the process of the school-wide intervention of a state school improvement team. A qualitative case study approach utilizing the constant comparative method of data analysis was employed.

Chapter three includes (a) an overview of the overall research questions, (b) the design of the study, (c) the data sources, (d) data collection procedures, (e) data analysis methods, and (f) the limitations of the study.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What did the principal identify as chief challenges and barriers during the recovery process?
2. How did the principal perceive the intervention of the external, state school improvement team?
3. What effects did the recovery process have on the principal over the first year of recovery?

4. How did the principal perceive the state of the school at the end of the first year of recovery?

The Design

The design of any research study is dependent on the questions being asked. In qualitative research, highly descriptive data allow the researcher to answer "how" and "why" by presenting data from the subject's experiences and perspectives as perceived through his own eyes and described in his own words (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Merriam, 1998). Most qualitative research occurs *in situ* where what or whom is being examined is examined in the natural setting in which events take place (Stake, 1988). Erickson (1990) viewed qualitative research as having "the potential to illuminate the 'invisibility of everyday life,' that is, to make the familiar strange and therefore more easily examined and understood" (p. 84).

This study described one principal's perspectives of events unfolding within the school's natural setting—a setting that was viewed as low-performing by the Georgia State Department of Education. Qualitative approaches attempt to provide an accurate picture of unique, individual experiences as they unfold within natural contexts. Since the central focus of this study was to examine the perspectives of a principal experiencing the presence of an external school improvement team, a case study approach was able to provide an accurate picture of unique, individual experiences of the principal in the school's setting.

Although differences exist in the way in which case studies are defined, there does exist agreement about certain aspects that are desirable in this method. Patton (1990) defined the case study as one that seeks to describe an entity in great depth,

whether it is a person, program, event, process, community, or time period. He further believed that, "regardless of the unit of analysis, a qualitative case study seeks to describe that unit in depth and detail, in context, and holistically" (p. 54). To this end, a case study approach enables a researcher to view specific situations in depth, allowing for an extended glimpse at the particular characteristics of natural events that would take place regardless of whether or not the researcher was present.

Case studies are useful in studying particular situations in great depth (Patton, 1990), and they typically have four goals, which include to:

1. use the lens of expert knowledge through which to view individual phenomena;
2. identify all relevant data;
3. look at other possible interpretations of the data; and,
4. examine whether the results have any implications for other settings. (Yin, 1992)

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) stated, "the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case" (p. 245). The researcher sought to examine the perspectives of a principal whose school was in the process of recovery but acknowledges that the perspectives of all participants during school recovery are important. Parents view recovery through their roles as their children's advocates. Teachers view the process from a classroom perspective. The views of children offer a look at recovery from the learner's perspective. Though all views are important, the researcher purposefully chose to study the principal's point of view in-depth and over time, because of the researcher's own experiences in the field of educational leadership.

The present study sought to identify instances in which a principal faced challenges, difficulties, or quandaries during the experience of the intervention of the school improvement team, as well as the source or direction from which any challenges,

difficulties, and quandaries came. Further, the present study sought the principal's perspective regarding reasons for these challenges, difficulties, and quandaries as well as how the situations came to pass. The traits of the qualitative case study model placed along side the goals of the present study formed a seamless match.

Design of the Current Study

Interviews were conducted at the school site with the principal of Peck Elementary School (a pseudonym) in order to better "know the local meanings that activities and practices" held at Peck (Erickson, 1990, p. 83). In order to maintain the open-ended nature of the case study method, the interviews were semi-structured so that "the interviewer [could] introduce the topic, then guide the discussion by asking specific questions" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 5). A total of four semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to follow the responses of the principal with follow-up questions in order to gain a fuller understanding of topics as they emerged. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) supported the open-ended nature of questioning participants because "the researcher cannot always know the ideal scope until data collection is under way" (p. 16). The researcher asked both structured and unstructured questions (See Appendix A). Clarifying questions were utilized at the discretion of the researcher.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred from Fall, 2001 to Spring, 2002. Interviews were conducted approximately six weeks apart from one another to give the researcher the opportunity to transcribe audiotapes, code transcripts, and develop follow-up questions and clarifying questions. Peck Elementary School was chosen as the site for this study

for several reasons. First, Peck Elementary School was identified as a "low-performing" school by the School Improvement Team Program of the Georgia Department of Education during the 2000-2001 school year when, through the analysis of standardized testing scores on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), more than 50 percent of its students were labeled as *does not meet* standards in the area of reading. Because of this low performance, the school was classified as one eligible for intervention by a state school improvement team. Second, Peck Elementary had, through the action of the Board of Education, voluntarily elected to enlist the support of the State Department of Education by utilizing the external school improvement team.

The location of Peck Elementary School was easily accessible to the researcher, who had established a two-hour travel parameter from his resident city. Entrée and willingness of participants to engage in this study were also factors. After the researcher ascertained which schools in Central Georgia were rated as *does not meet* standards on the CRCT by the Georgia State Department of Education, a list of qualifying school systems was compiled by the researcher. Through network sampling of cohort members of the University of Georgia and Fort Valley State University partnership doctoral program, the list of seven schools was narrowed to two counties. The researcher contacted one county and was refused entrée. The second county school system agreed to allow the researcher access to an elementary school (Peck Elementary School), and the principal was willing to participate.

The principal of Peck Elementary School was selected by the Busbee County Board of Education to lead the subject school before the commencement of the 1999-2000 school year. At that time, the school's scores on student achievement tests

indicated low-performing status in the areas of both reading and math. Donald Taylor, a 25-year veteran teacher and principal, was the subject of this study, as he was the principal of a low-performing elementary school (grades 3-5) whose superintendent elected to receive the intervention of an external, state school improvement team.

Given the length of the study and the case study approach, a small sample size was determined to be reasonable to focus more intently on the data and the meanings that could be derived from such a small sample size. Wolcott (1994) supported small sample sizes for case study approaches and believed that "increasing the number of cases serves only to reduce proportionately the attention that can be given to any one of them" (p. 182).

Procedures for Data Collection

The principal of Peck Elementary School and his superintendent were asked for permission to conduct research at the school. The researcher assured both that the name of the district, the school, and the participant would remain confidential. Pseudonyms were developed for this purpose. The participant was asked to sign two Participant Consent Forms (See Appendix C). One copy was given to the participant. The researcher retained the other.

Multiple data collection resources are advocated for case study research (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990) in order to enhance validity through triangulation that Stake (1988) defined as, "trying to arrive at the same meaning by at least three independent approaches" (p. 263). Data collection commenced in Fall, 2001and concluded in Spring, 2002.

Data were derived from:

1. two full-day observations of the principal

The researcher conducted two full-day observations of the principal. The researcher attended faculty meetings and shadowed the principal. The researcher took fieldnotes during the observations. The researcher was allowed full access to the principal during all activities.

2. semi-structured interviews were conducted

Data were collected through four interviews with the principal. Interviews varied in length from one hour to two hours. Following each interview, tapes were numbered and labeled with the principal's pseudonym, the date, and the time. Fieldnotes were taken for later comparison with the tapes and interview transcriptions. All data were kept under lock and key and were accessible only to the researcher and the researcher's major professor.

During interviews, the researcher asked probing questions designed to elicit the greatest amount of detail and clarification from the principal's perspective. At the conclusion of each interview, the principal was given the opportunity to voice any questions regarding the research. The researcher, following each interview, used an Interview Reflection Form to track fieldnotes and to develop follow-up questions for the next interview. Four interview sessions were scheduled.

3. fieldnotes were taken

The researcher kept fieldnotes during all interview sessions. These fieldnotes became an additional source of data. The fieldnotes allowed the researcher to note important aspects

of each interview and provided a way to track initial insights before formal data analysis began.

4. relevant artifacts from the research site and the county were collected

Relevant artifacts such as agendas from faculty meetings and paperwork pertaining to the external school improvement team were retained as a source of data and as a means to assist with confirming findings.

Summary of Data Collection Procedures

Over a period of eight months, data from multiple sources were gathered for this study. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with the subject. Other data included fieldnotes and artifacts related to the site, the district, and the external school improvement team.

Data Analysis

The present study used the constant comparative method as the specific unit of analysis. This method first surfaced in the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), who described constant comparative analysis as having four stages: "comparing the data applicable to each conceptual category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory" (p. 105). As data collection proceeds, trends are discovered, and then evolve throughout the process through "integration and the refinement of categories, properties, and hypotheses" (Merriam, 1998, p. 191).

According to Strauss and Corbin (1994), constant comparative analysis holds that, "theory may be *generated* initially from the data, or, if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be *elaborated* and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them" (p. 273, emphasis in the original).

Restated, knowledge "evolves" during the research process, and develops "through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (p. 273). The present study used the following sources for data collection: four interviews with the subject (transcriptions from audio taped sessions), fieldnotes recorded by the researcher, artifacts collected from the field, and two full days at Peck Elementary School attending meetings with the principal.

Procedures for Data Analysis:

1. Transcriptions of interviews, researcher's fieldnotes, and artifacts were assembled and read for the purpose of content identification.

The researcher conducted four semi-structured interviews over the course of the school year. Appendix A details the questions asked during each interview. In order to ensure that the participant had the opportunity to come to closure, during the final interview, the researcher introduced the four open-ended questions that correlated with the four central research questions addressing the overall purpose of the study.

The principal was asked:

A. Please summarize and reflect on the challenges and barriers you have faced during the first year of recovery.
B. Please summarize and reflect on the school improvement team's intervention itself during the first year of recovery.
C. Please summarize and reflect on how the process of the state school improvement team's intervention has affected you both personally and professionally at the end of the first year of the school improvement team intervention.

D. Please summarize and reflect of the state of the school at the end of the first year of the school improvement team intervention.

The researcher's fieldnotes were also developed. Artifacts took the form of faculty meeting agendas and information on the America's Choice program obtained from the state school intervention team.

2. The researcher added notes to the transcripts to identify concepts, which then aided in the identification of themes.

At the completion of each interview, transcripts were analyzed for the purpose of identifying emergent themes. This process also allowed the researcher to make notes regarding prompts to be used during subsequent interviews. As the interview process continued, semi-structured questions allowed for more probing into themes established in previous interviews.

Codes were created to identify themes that continued across interviews. When a theme developed new characteristics, the theme's code was modified to reflect developing trends within the data, which allowed clear identification of the evolution of themes across interviews and over the entire interview process. Figure 3-1 summarizes the initial codes and emergent themes.

Figure 3-1

Emerging Themes, Interview 1

THEME: Emotional effect on principal

TYPES:

EEP	emotional effect on principal

THEME: Morale issues

TYPES:

MP	morale, principal
MPIV	morale, pre-intervention
MS- SL	morale, staff, school liaison
MS	morale, staff
MS-POL	morale, staff, polarization
SP	staff polarization

THEME: School Improvement Team's America's Choice Program issues

TYPES:

SIT-ACP-FIN	school improvement team, America's Choice Program, financial
SIT-ACP-MAT	school improvement team, America's Choice Program, materials
SIT-ACP-SCH	school improvement team, America's Choice Program, scheduling
SIT-ACP-TRN-P	school improvement team, America's Choice Program, training, principal

3. Memoing in the form of detailed notations was added to clarify details observed during interviews and the two full day observations.

The process of coding and memoing allowed the researcher to identify trends and themes more clearly. This process also allowed the researcher to develop new categories when observed, as well as modify existing categories as warranted by the data. Figure 3-2 summarizes the themes across interviews.

Figure 3-2

Overall Emergent Themes

	Int. 1	Int. 2	Int. 3	Int. 4
THEME: Communication issues				
TYPES:				
C-CO: communication, central office	X	X	X	X
C-CO-DM: communication, central office, decision-making	X	X	X	X
C-CO-FIN: communication, central office, financial	X	X		
C-CO-SPT: communication, central office, support	X		X	
C-CO-S: communication, central office, superintendent			X	X
C-BOE: communication, Board of Education			X	X
PC: principal communication	X		X	
PC-S: principal communication to staff	X	X	X	X
SIT-C: school improvement team, communication	X	X	X	X
SIT-C-ACP: school improvement team, communication, America's Choice Program	X	X	X	X
TL-C: team leader, school improvement team, communication	X	X	X	X
C-TL-S: communication, team leader, staff		X		
SIT-C-ACP-STATE: school improvement team, communication, America's Choice Program, state level representative		X	X	
THEME: Conflict				
TYPES:				
CONFL- P-TL: conflict, principal/team leader	X	X	X	X
CONFL-P-S: conflict, principal, staff		X		
CONFL-P-SIT-STATE: conflict, principal, school improvement team, state		X	X	
MT: mutual trust	X	X	X	X
TL-COOP: team leader, school improvement team, cooperation	X	X		

Figure 3-2, continued

Overall Emergent Themes

	Int. 1	Int. 2	Int. 3	Int. 4
THEME: Morale issues				
TYPES:				
MP: morale, principal	X	X	X	X
MS- SL: morale, staff, school liaison	X			
MS: morale, staff	X	X	X	X
MS-POL: morale, staff, polarization	X	X	X	X
SP: staff polarization	X	X	X	X
THEME: Time demands				
TYPES:				
T: time	X	X	X	X
T-S: time, staff		X	X	X
THEME: School Improvement Team's America's Choice Program issues				
TYPES:				
SIT-ACP-FIN: school improvement team, America's Choice Program, financial	X	X	X	
SIT-ACP-MAT: school improvement team, America's Choice Program, materials	X	X		
SIT-ACP-SCH: school improvement team, America's Choice Program, scheduling	X	X	X	
SIT-ACP-TRN-P: school improvement team, America's Choice Program, training, principal	X	X	X	X
SIT-SCP-TRN-S: school improvement team, America's Choice Program, training, staff		X	X	
SIT-SCP-TRN-DLT: school improvement team, America's Choice Program, training, design team leader		X		
THEME: Attrition				
TYPES:				
SWD: student withdrawal from school	X			
THEME: Facility				
TYPES:				
FACIL : facility		X		

Figure 3-2, continued

Overall Emergent Themes

	Int. 1	Int. 2	Int. 3	Int. 4
THEME: America's Choice Benefits				
TYPES:				
ACP-BEN: America's Choice Program benefits		X		
THEME: Quality of Teaching				
TYPES:				
TQ: quality of teaching		X	X	X
THEME: Major Shifts				
TYPES:				
SHIFT-CONT: shift in perception of control of school			X	X
SHIFT-M-P: shift, morale, principal			X	X
SHIFT-M-S: shift, morale, staff			X	X

Regarding the method used in this study, the "constant comparative method of data analysis is widely used in all kinds of qualitative studies, whether or not the researcher is building a grounded theory" (Merriam, 1998, p. 18). After an exhaustive search, it was assumed that the present study would produce baseline data regarding the identification of issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of recovery by means of an external, school improvement team, as no other studies measuring the exact phenomena could be found in the professional literature.

In a case study in which the researcher and subject inevitably became familiar and comfortable in each other's presence, it is important to note that, "unlike the model experimenter, the qualitative researcher is not a faceless replicate. Objectivity in the

conventional sense is an illusion; the subject's intentions, beliefs, views of the researcher, and interests must be considered" (Smith, 1987, p. 175).

Trustworthiness

Merriam (1998) emphasized the importance of trustworthiness any time research is conducted in applied fields. Four properties vital to trustworthiness and essential when presenting either qualitative or quantitative data are validity, reliability, generalizability, and neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1987).

Validity

Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. Gay and Airasian (2000) stated, "Validity is the most important characteristic a test or measuring instrument can possess" (p. 161). The type of validation used in the present study was respondent validation, which is a process of forming tentative findings after each interview throughout the data collection period and then reporting those tentative findings back to the subject on subsequent visits. After each interview and transcription, the researcher recorded themes by memoing. On subsequent visits, the subject was given the option of verifying whether or not the findings were consistent with his intended responses.

For example, the following interchange between the researcher and the subject at the beginning of Interview 2 illustrates an example of the opportunity for respondent validation afforded to the subject:

> QUESTION: During Interview 1, several themes emerged throughout. I'd like to review those at this time and ask you to tell me if these themes are consistent with the intentions and perspectives you expressed during

Interview 1. Please alert me if there is any clarification needed on any of them or if my observation and interpretation of these themes is incorrect. If you have anything to add regarding your perspectives, please feel free to do so. Please add any perspectives you feel I may have missed during Interview 1. Also, please confirm whether these themes are correct.

SUBJECT: Okay.

QUESTION: *First, I identified your perspective of challenges with communication at the following levels: central office, staff, the school improvement team, America's Choice program, and with the team leader from the school improvement team. Is this consistent with your intended responses?*

SUBJECT: Yes, it is.

Respondent validation gives the subject the option of confirming the credibility of any findings, or in the present case, emergent themes, at points throughout the period of data collection (Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 1993).

Reliability

A very general and loose synonym for reliability is *dependability.* Gay and Airasian (2000) differentiated validity and reliability, stating, "although validity tells test users about the appropriateness of a test or measure, reliability tells about the consistency of the scores produced" (p. 170). Regarding qualitative data, Merriam (1998) cautioned, "reliability is problematic in the social sciences because human behavior is never static" (p. 205). The research of Patton (1990) insisted on the importance of seeking out and recognizing researcher bias when conducting qualitative research.

Three steps were taken to encourage the reliability of the data collected in the present study. First, statements attempting to vocalize any preconceptions were made after careful reflection by the researcher well before data collection began in an attempt to bring researcher bias to light prior to data collection. This process is known as member checking and is illustrated in the researcher's perspective (See Appendix D). Second, the dissertation committee chairperson acted in the capacity of an external auditor during the scientific development of the interview questions (See Appendix A) and during data analysis procedures. Third, data from multiple sources allowed data to be triangulated (interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and artifacts).

Generalizability

In reference to case study research, Merriam (1998) questioned, "whether or not it is possible to generalize from a single case, or from qualitative inquiry in general" (p. 208). Gay and Airasian (2000) shared this concern, stating:

> One important generalizability problem associated with many single-subject designs is the effect of the baseline condition on the subsequent effects of the treatment condition. We can never be sure that the treatment effects are the same as they would have been if the treatment phase had come before the baseline phase. (p. 402)

Any discussion of external validity must consider generalizability within the context of the person reading the study. That is, any researcher looking to apply the findings to their own situations is, perhaps the best judge of whether these findings apply to their own situations. Merriam (1998) called this concept reader generalizability. To enable others who may wish to generalize the findings of this study to their particular settings, Chapter IV presented a detailed, contextual background. Others who may potentially generalize these findings to their own settings are both encouraged and

cautioned to carefully compare the two contexts before drawing a conclusion as to any generalizations from these findings (Merriam, 1998).

Neutrality

Merriam (1998) stated, "all observations and analyses are limited…by the sensitivity of the researcher' (p. 22). Patton (1990) acknowledged limitations for neutrality in qualitative research due to the fact that "the researcher is the instrument of both data collection and data interpretation, and because a qualitative study includes having personal contact with and getting close to the people and the situation under study" (p. 54). Neutrality, Patton indicated, is "simply means that the investigator does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths" (p. 55). In an attempt to counter this possible confound, Patton suggested the reporting of "any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis and interpretation-either positively or negatively- in the minds of the users of the findings" (p. 472).

To counter these possibilities, the researcher did two things. First he listed possible sources of bias from his own professional background (Appendix D). Because the researcher is a former elementary school assistant principal, it was necessary to identify any preconceptions that could affect data collection as well as the analysis of data. Possible preconceptions were outlined before data collection for the purpose of heightening the researcher's awareness of them and thus, minimizing any possible effects. The researcher believes that once charged with a mission from the central office, principals should be allowed to implement the mission cooperatively with their faculty with minimal central office involvement during the process. The researcher currently is a

behavior specialist working throughout a system's schools in the capacity of a central office consultant and also may have preconceptions toward the research given this perspective as well. The researcher believes that principals must be held accountable for ensuring that student learning is the highest priority of all faculty and staff at a school.

Second, the researcher made a thirty minute audio tape on which he brainstormed his feelings and opinions regarding as many components of the present study as he could recount: restructuring, principals, takeovers, state intervention, school improvement teams, test scores, recovery, and Georgia House Bill 1187. This was done in an effort to remind himself of opinions he should be careful to avoid from clouding his view, to identify any possible biases with which to check data against throughout the course of the study, and to inform any others who might choose to generalize findings from this study to other settings (reader generalizability), so that they might consider possible researcher biases when considering generalizability.

Limitations of the Study

Issac and Michael (1984) warned about the one shot case study and brought to light the idea of transferability, which asks whether a single case study can provide generalizations transferable to other situations. However other researchers (Lincoln & Guba; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1988) argued for the case study approach as an effective method for context-specific activities such as, in this study, principal perspectives during the recovery of a low-performing school. This study was not intended as a means for making broad implications or recommendations concerning principal perspectives during the recovery of all low-performing schools.

- From an N=1 standpoint, it is difficult to generalize findings across populations;
- The research was conducted in a school that did not voluntarily elect to receive assistance from an external state school improvement team; and,
- The school housed grades 3-5.

Chapter Summary

A case study approach using the constant comparative method of data analysis was conducted for the purpose of examining the issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school in central Georgia. Multiple resources were used for data collection, including the transcripts of four semi-structured interview sessions with the subject, two full days of observation, fieldnotes, and relevant artifacts.

Trustworthiness was established utilizing the properties of validity, reliability, generalizability, and neutrality. External validity was encouraged through a) the researcher's post-interview memoing regarding emergent themes and b) the respondent's validation of emergent themes during subsequent interviews. Reliability was encouraged through the steps of member checking (See Appendix B), the utilization of an external auditor during development of the interview questions (See Appendix A), and triangulation of the data utilizing interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and artifacts.

Reader generalizability was encouraged through the presentation of a detailed, contextual background. Neutrality was encouraged by a) the researcher's listing of possible sources of bias from his own professional background, as well as, b) the creation of a thirty-minute audiotape, on which he brainstormed his feelings and opinions

regarding the components of the present study for the purpose of reminding himself of possible biases prior to data collection.

The purpose of this study was to examine the issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school. The present study hoped that the identification of the issues and challenges in the present case might assist school leaders in similar situations in the identification of possible issues and challenges in their own attempts at recovery.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of one elementary principal whose school (grades 3-5) was rated by the State of Georgia as being low-performing and whose superintendent elected to have an external, stated appointed school improvement team assist in the recovery of the low-performing school. The duration of the study spanned one school year. The knowledge discovered through such a study might assist principals, school systems, and others interested in understanding the challenges and issues affecting a principal during the first year in the recovery of a low-performing school being assisted by an external agency. It might also serve to help prevent failure in other schools.

Using a qualitative case study approach, the researcher sought to uncover the challenges that a principal faced during the first year of the recovery process in an elementary school (grades 3-5) in central Georgia.

The overall research questions that guided this study included:

1. What did the principal identify as chief challenges and barriers during the recovery process?
2. How did the principal perceive the intervention of the external, state school improvement team?
3. What effects did the recovery process have on the principal over the first year of recovery?

4. How did the principal perceive the state of the school at the end of the first year of recovery?

To address these questions, the researcher collected data using a qualitative case study approach and the constant comparative method of data analysis. Multiple data sources included two full-day observations of the principal, four semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, and relevant artifacts.

Peck Elementary School in Gentry, Georgia, the political seat of Busbee County, was chosen for the study due to its proximity to the researcher and the availability of entrée into the setting. Peck was the only public school that served children from grades 3-5 in Gentry. Peck served 631 students in grades 3-5, who were taught by 39 teachers, with a student/teacher ratio of 16.3. The faculty was considered to have a strong stability level, with teacher turnover averaging 3-5 teachers during each of the past three school years. The average teaching experience of the faculty was 11 years. Of the 631 students, 449 were eligible for free/reduced price lunches. Student population was racially diverse, with 484 African American, 107 White, 37 Hispanic, 1 Asian, and 2 American Indian/Alaskan students (Georgia Department of Education, 2000b).

Context of School Improvement at Peck Elementary School

Peck Elementary School was first identified as low-performing in 1996. When Donald Taylor was hired by the Busbee County Board of Education in 1999 to be Peck's principal, the school improvement plan in place was the Success For All program, a reading based curriculum designed to be implemented internally at the school site, with no external involvement or intervention. During Taylor's first two years at Peck using

the Success For a All program and targeted teaching, scores on student achievement tests demonstrated progress in each measured academic area each year (See Figure 4-1).

FIGURE 4-1

Percentage of Students Classified as "Does Not Meet Expectations" on Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test- Peck Elementary School

Year	Reading	English/Lang. Arts	Math
1999-2000	54	48	69
2000-2001	44	40	67

In 2001, the new superintendent of Busbee County Schools *mandated* that:

1. Success For All would remain in place at Peck; however,
2. In addition, the America's Choice program would be implemented by an external, state school improvement team.

Once mandated, the external, state school improvement team spent five days in classrooms at Peck coaching staff in effective teaching skills. The state school improvement team included eight external, master teachers and a state school improvement team leader. Charles Reynolds served as the state school improvement team leader. After the initial, five-day intervention, the external, state school improvement team did *not* return to Peck. Instead, only Charles Reynolds maintained sole contact with the school for the remainder of the school year. He was charged by the state with overseeing the implementation of the America's Choice program (See Figure 4-2) at Peck Elementary School.

FIGURE 4-2

External, State School Improvement Team Intervention and Timeline

Date	Action
April 2001	Visited Peck to determine eligibility for state school improvement team program.
August 2001-May 2002	The team spent five days at Peck coaching staff in effective teaching skills. Only Charles Reynolds returned to Pack Elementary School.

Essentially, Charles Reynolds, as the school improvement team leader, was sanctioned by the state to oversee implementation of the America's Choice program at Peck Elementary School. As team leader of the school improvement team, he served in an additional role. Charles Reynolds was simultaneously a member of the America's Choice Design Team. In this dual capacity, Reynolds was expected to visit Peck Elementary School once a week to assist in implementing the provisions of America's Choice and for monitoring progress.

With the addition of the America's Choice program, two school improvement models were simultaneously in effect at Peck Elementary School during the current year. The principal and staff were essentially implementing two separate intervention models during the current year; however, implementation of the America's Choice program was being directed under the external guidance of the state school improvement team leader.

Success For All, a reading-based program designed to be implemented internally, provided additional time and strategies focusing on intensive development of reading skills for elementary students. Similarly, the America's Choice program focused on strengthening reading skills across the elementary curriculum.

The America's Choice model used the Design Team (See Figure 4-3) to oversee implementation of the program. The America's Choice Design Team was chaired by the assistant principal of Peck Elementary School. Additional members of the Design Team included the principal, three teachers, and the external, state school improvement team leader, Charles Reynolds. It is important to note that the external, state school improvement team leader held a dual role during the implementation process:

1. The state school improvement team leader was charged by the state with overseeing implementation of the America's Choice program at Peck, and,
2. The state school improvement team leader was charged by America's Choice to serve as a member of the Design Team, which, in turn, was charged with implementing America's Choice at the school site.

FIGURE 4-3

America's Choice Design Team

Date	Action
August 2001-May 2002	Oversaw implementation of America's Choice at Peck Elementary School.

Members: Assistant principal—Chairperson, school improvement team leader, principal, and three teachers.

Profile of the Principal

Education and Work Experience

During the 2001-2002 School Year, Principal Donald Taylor was beginning his third year as principal of Peck Elementary. He had assumed the position after serving as a principal for 3 years in a South Georgia middle school of 850 students. His total years of experience in education numbered 32, having served 22 years as a classroom teacher and 4 years as an assistant principal before becoming a principal. He completed coursework for the Ed. D. Degree, though he had yet to complete the dissertation. Appendix E addresses the duties and responsibilities outlined in the principal's job description.

Participant Description of Himself as Principal and Leader

On the researcher's first impression, Principal Donald Taylor appeared to be a quiet, unassuming leader. Leaning back in his chair while seated behind an office desk piled high with agendas, ongoing projects, memos, and messages, the principal and leader of Peck Elementary School approached the researcher's questions in a polite, businesslike manner. When addressing issues at his school, Taylor spoke in terms of the first person "we" rather than the first person "I" throughout. As the interviews unfolded, what was revealed was a devoted and passionate leader who held deep convictions about the possibilities of his school, staff, and students.

Regarding learning, Taylor was quick to express a hardy belief in the academic abilities of his students. His first response when asked about his philosophy on education was, "everyone can be successful at some level of learning [though] the degree that they have it and the topics that it may be on are different." Accordingly, Principal Taylor

emphasized the importance of making academic topics relevant to students, stating, "If you can do that, you'll be teaching."

Taylor viewed the duties of the principal as wide in scope (See Appendix E). Taylor's job description encompassed typical duties assigned to the principal. According to the district job description provided by Taylor, his duties included supervising the implementation of the curriculum, managing finances, and overseeing daily operations of the school.

When first discussing his philosophy on the principalship, Taylor was quick to point out the importance of the principal's role as the instructional leader for both the students and staff of the school, saying that principals "are teachers that have a wider base of students. They have to deal with adults and they have students." In addition to instructional duties, Taylor noted:

> You have to change rolls a lot during the day. Sometimes you may need to be a disciplinarian and sometimes you need to be an instructor. And sometimes you need to be a counselor. You wear different hats because you are dealing with so many different people [with] different needs… You have a lot of roles to play and all of them have to be sensitive to the needs of other people. (Interview 1, 57-61)

Within the broad scope of his duties, Taylor accented the importance of several key factors he believed vital to one's success in the position of principal. He emphasized the need for a willingness to accept and deal with an almost constant state of change. Taylor also spoke of the importance of being a good manager. "And," he said, "You've got to be able to communicate…[to be] a good communicator with people. You've got to be able to read people and know how to talk to them," adding, "You have to have the skill of listening more than anything else."

On Peck Elementary as a Low-Performing School

The qualities needed to be an "effective" principal become even more vital when a principal takes over a low-performing school, according to Taylor. "When you take over a low-performing school," Taylor said, "One of the things you've got to realize is that it didn't just become low-performing. There is a history behind it that's created it's being low-performing." He attributed the mindset of a low-performing school to be created by "a mentality among the teachers and other staff members that perhaps they are not as good as everybody else, or perhaps they are not as educated." Taylor felt a mentality of underachievement easily could be adopted by students, parents, and the surrounding community, as well, as he felt was the case at Peck Elementary School. Still, Taylor agreed to accept the position of principal at Peck with a full understanding of its low-performing status. He claimed he welcomed the challenge. Taylor summarized the low-performing state of Peck Elementary and its surrounding community at the time he assumed the helm of the school in 1999:

> When I came in two years ago, I was told that the school was not scoring well on standardized tests, there was no leadership in the school, the teachers do pretty much what they want to do and teach what they want to teach, and that there is a lot of animosity between the administration and teachers. The community does not feel good about the school itself. The principal does not know the kids' names. When several community leaders tried to identify the principal they couldn't tell what he looked like, whether it was a male or female. So coming into this school I saw a need to do those kinds of things and make the persona of the principal very vivid, which you would normally not do, but to let the community know that the school was changing. (Interview 1, 66-77)

Taylor also attributed the school's low-performing status to the socio-economic factors that characterized the surrounding feeder area, from which the school drew over 90 percent of its enrollees. The environment, said Taylor, seemed to provide little

support for academic endeavors. He described the area as "predominantly low-income and in many of the homes there [was] no reading material." Taylor characterized parent-student interaction as initially minimal and one created by a social dilemma within many homes. "The parents that are present are either not working and not really too concerned with education, or they are working a great deal and not home to help the kids with homework or to provide any kind of feeling that education is important, so the kids get that."

Still, Taylor emphasized, regardless of past difficulties, the school had made substantial progress in its mindset and culture in the two years prior to the 2001-2002 school year, saying, "We've got different people, we've got a whole new day. We've changed [the school's] image and started working with the teachers and the students to change their image of who they are and what they could do." (Interview I, 77-80).

Peck Elementary School's 4th grade (the only Peck grade level required to take the state student achievement test at the time) achievement test results appeared to support the principal's claim that Peck Elementary was a school making progress and ridding itself of its low-performing past. On the 4th grade Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), Peck Elementary School made numeric gains in both its reading and math scores during each of the two years preceding the implementation of the state school improvement team (See Figure 4-1).

During 2000-2001, the school year immediately preceding the implementation of the state school improvement team, Peck 4th grade students demonstrated gains of 10 percent in reading, 8 percent in language arts, and 3 percent in math, making it the only school in Busbee County to demonstrate growth in each academic area measured by the

Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) (Office of Education Accountability, 2001b).

For Taylor, the battle to lead Peck through difficult times demanded a multi-faceted approach. He believed the progress at Peck thus far to be due to increased communication, a marked change in the cultural mindset of the students, staff, and community, hiring and retaining excellent teachers, and targeted teaching and learning, stating, "We instituted targeted learning, targeted instruction and our scores started coming up. The first year they came up a good bit and the second year we showed tremendous gains on tests."

To understand the time frame in which Taylor began as principal of Peck Elementary School, Figure 4-4 illustrates the history of Peck Elementary School from 1996-2002.

FIGURE 4-4

Time Line: Peck Elementary School, 1996-2002.

1996	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**
Peck is classified low-performing	Previous principal retires	Taylor assumes principalship	CRCT scores improve
		Success For All implemented	Success For All in place
2001	**2002**		
CRCT scores improve			
Success For All in place	April: Success For All dropped		
Spring: New Superintendent			
July: School Imp. team mandated	April: School Imp. team dropped		
July: America's Choice mandated	April: America's Choice dropped		

Participant Views of External School Improvement Teams

Riding what he perceived to be a wave of progress among all facets of the school after his first two years as its leader, Taylor said:

> We invited a school improvement review team to come in at the end of last year, at the end of April, to do a review of the school. There were eight members of the team and they spent eight days here reviewing the school and telling us what was right that they saw, what was wrong that they saw, so that we [could] make some changes. (Interview 1, 114-117)

This event marked Taylor's first experience with a school improvement team, and he claimed that he welcomed the team's input, unaware that the team might be called on to implement any changes within the school.

Taylor later learned that the school improvement team would play a greater role at Peck during the following school year, 2001-2002, when "at the end of the year, we were given a directive from the central office that we should take on the school improvement team's America's Choice program. It wasn't our selection. It was handed to us. 'You will do this.'" Prior to the beginning of the intervention of the school improvement team, Taylor believed school improvement teams to be a much-needed service to low-performing schools showing little or no progress toward the improvement of student achievement.

Taylor summarized his philosophy and approach to the principalship as an instructor, motivator, mentor, manager, and cheerleader by emphasizing the importance of inspiring human beings to reach their highest individual and collective potentials:

> I think that if you're not someone who inspires people… You've got to show them that you are willing to do more than what they have seen in other principals so that they will do more than what they have seen in other teachers… But you've also got to go in and show people that you believe in them or they will never come up and start working like normal. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you tell people they are bad, they will be

> bad. If you tell them they are good then they will prove you right. (Interview 1, 46-58)

Given his philosophy of building a positive learning environment by empowering teachers and students, Taylor said he felt ready to assume the task. The following section presents the results of data collection.

Results

Challenges and Barriers Associated with Implementing a Recovery Strategy

The first question sought to uncover the challenges and barriers faced by the principal of Peck Elementary School, a school rated as low-performing, during the implementation of new policies and the program, America's Choice, administered by an external, state school improvement team as strategies to recover the low-performing school. The challenges that Donald Taylor, principal of Peck Elementary School, faced included difficulties in communication, conflict management, maintaining staff morale, and time management demands. These themes were further corroborated by fieldnotes taken during the full days the researcher spent shadowing the principal and during each of the four interviews. Artifacts included the principal's job description, descriptions of America's Choice correspondence between Taylor and the central administration, and test score data.

Difficulties in Communication

Data revealed several areas in which communication became a prominent issue facing the subject during the first year of the recovery process. Across all interviews, the subject reported major difficulties in communication a) between himself and the school improvement team, b) between himself and the school improvement team's leader, and c) with regard to the availability of information pertaining to implementation of the

America's Choice program. To a lesser degree (reported in two or less of the four interviews), the subject reported difficulties in communication d) between the school improvement team leader and the staff, and e) between himself and the superintendent and Board of Education. The final situation regarding communication with the superintendent and Board of Education was reported as a challenge during Interviews 1 and 2 (2001); however, the principal noted marked improvement in communication with both the superintendent and Board of Education during Interviews 3 and 4 (2002).

Philosophically, staff communication was reported as a vital issue in effective school governance according to Taylor when he stated, "You've got to be able to communicate…a good communicator with people. You've got to be able to read people and know how to talk to them." Taylor addressed the importance of listening as a component of effective communication, adding, "You have to have the skill of listening more than anything else."

Taylor emphasized across all interviews the importance of communication with his staff during the first year of recovery. Describing staff communication during the early months of recovery's first year, he said, "I'm being very open with my teachers. I will tell them everything that's going on. I am not holding it back." He attributed this frankness with the staff as having "helped a majority of them to pull with me," adding, "I tell them whenever I get any information what I know at that point. And they know I'll do that." Taylor recounted the presence of his own uncertainty along with that of the staff regarding communication during the recovery experience, saying, "I was where the rest of the faculty is in trying to figure out what was going on."

Communication with the School Improvement Team

Across all interviews, the subject described his relationship with the school improvement team as being characterized by minimal communication, saying during Interview 1 (September, 2001), "The [school improvement team officials] are telling the principal and assistant principal very little about the program. They've been so slow about getting us information. We don't know what to do. We [don't] know and they won't tell us." Taylor attributed the lack of communication between the school improvement team and the school to the fact that, "The team was only here one time." By Interview 4 (March, 2002), Taylor reported that communication with the school improvement team had become nonexistent.

Taylor viewed a lack of communication with the school improvement team as a primary cause of his and the staff's perspective that there was a lack of clarity regarding the school improvement team's role in the recovery process. A lack of communication on this level also was discussed in Interviews 2, 3, and 4. During Interview 2 (November, 2001), when asked if the school improvement team had visited his school in the time since the first interview, Taylor responded, "No, they haven't." When asked to define the school improvement team's role in recovery during Interview 3 (February, 2002), the principal responded, "Don't have a clue."

Communication with the Team Leader

Communication with the team leader of the school improvement team also presented a challenge to Taylor, who said, "Getting any information out of him that is worthwhile for the program is nearly impossible. He's a nice guy, but we don't get anything out of him." Taylor attributed this difficulty, in part, to what he viewed as the

team leader's own lack of information regarding the process, stating, "He's going for training only a week before he comes to us [then] tells us something [pertaining to the recovery program]." During Interview 1 (September, 2001), Taylor reported that the team leader's presence in the school seemed limited, stating, "We have a team leader who has been here maybe once a week since school started. He stays here probably 3-4 hours, but he doesn't tell us anything…mostly he sits around drinking coffee and talking."

Taylor's concerns with team leader communication continued to be reported throughout the data collection process. During Interview 2 (November, 2001), after the emergence of a state of conflict between the principal and the team leader, Taylor reported that communication had declined further, stating the team leader, "has been in and out fairly quickly."

The principal attributed a possible cause of difficulties in communication between himself and the team leader as being related to the lack of sufficient training each of them received in the America's Choice program. Taylor said:

> The team leader's role is supposed to be that he would give us…step by step… what we are supposed to go about doing with the program. He hasn't been a leader in a school where they've done the program. But, pretty much, he doesn't know. He's never done the program. And he'll go for training a week or so before he comes to us, then he'll come in with all these ideas about how we're supposed to do it according to what America's Choice says in the training. (Interview 3, 160-170)

By Interview 4 (March, 2002), the superintendent announced the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. During Interview 4, Taylor reported continued lack of communication between himself and the team leader, stating, "We had a meeting scheduled yesterday and the team leader didn't show."

Communication Regarding the America's Choice Program and Training

The main area of the recovery process in which Taylor reported challenges and barriers in communication with the school improvement team and its leader was with regard to information pertaining to the America's Choice program, the vehicle by which recovery was to occur. Throughout the four interviews, Taylor reported difficulties in obtaining information he felt he needed to operate the program effectively, directives on procedures for implementation, and difficulties in obtaining timely training in the program for both himself and his staff.

Before the commencement of the 2001-2002 school year, Taylor said he attended a three-day training session in St. Simons, Georgia in mid-May. He reported, "two and a half days of it was a sales pitch and the [last] three hours [contained] a few of the details of how you do one element of [the program]." Taylor described his inquiry regarding existing school sites he might visit to see the America's Choice program in action:

> I asked for them to give me a list of places in the South that were using the program so that I could go and just see how they did it. To get an idea of what the day was like, what it looked like, anything. They I told me [pilot schools] weren't operating. They had been closed for the summer. I [later] found out that [the schools using the program] didn't close down until mid-June, so I was given erroneous information. (Interview 1, 293-299)

Taylor stated that the lack of communication with regard to America's Choice training continued into the school year, recounting:

> They told us that the principal will be going to four, three-day sessions throughout the school year. They cancelled that, and sent only teachers to it. So the principals [charged with implementing America's Choice] still don't know anything about it. All I know is what the teachers come back and tell me. (Interview 1, 301-304)

During Interview 1 (September, 2001), Taylor elaborated on the communication aspect, adding, "I really don't know what the program looks like at this point, and we're nine weeks into the year." Taylor summarized his concerns about communication regarding America's Choice at the end of September as follows:

> I've seen some of the general ideas of it, but how it should actually work and how you should have it set up for the full-year program is not sequential, and there's no way, from the information we've been given so far, to know. (Interview 1, 433-436)

The principal's concerns about communication regarding the America's Choice program continued across the remaining interviews. When asked about the progress of principal and teacher training schedules during Interview 2 (November, 2001), Taylor reported, "We've had no more training in that time." When he further voiced his concern about the need for principal training to a school improvement team official at the state level, "they arranged a session with a school in Florida [in December] if I would like to go and pay my own way to see it."

Feeling he did not possess adequate information to operate the America's Choice program, Taylor inquired for more information from the state level representative. He noted, "Their response was, 'It's too big a thing for you to understand. So we're going to roll it out for you in pieces. We will let you know what you need to know when you need to know it.'" During Interview 2 (November, 2001), Taylor was asked if he possessed enough information to give a presentation on America's Choice, to which he responded, "No. There's no way I could even…I could do fifteen minutes probably, and it would not be in detail." During the same interview, Taylor expressed concern about the lack of America's Choice training for his assistant principal, who also held the role of the appointed leader of the Design Team, a component for the guidance and implementation

of the America's Choice program at the school level. He stated that she had had no more training in the program than he had had.

Communication difficulties regarding America's Choice training were again reported during Interview 3 (February, 2002), when the principal was again asked if he felt he possessed sufficient knowledge to give a presentation on the program. Taylor responded, "Nope. I don't believe that I could do a class at the first level of America's Choice after having it this long." When asked if his teachers would be able to do the same, he said, "I believe some of them feel that they could, but for the most part, no. They're still wandering." Regarding teacher training, Taylor reflected during Interview 2 (November, 2001) on the six classroom teachers implementing the program, stating, "None of them have been given extensive training. The only training they get is when they have the two teachers who have received a week's training go into their rooms to show them how the program is supposed to work."

The principal also noted a lack of communication specifically regarding the financial aspects of implementing the America's Choice program. Regarding training, "We were told all training and travel would be paid by the state. They came back and changed that for us. Now they say that we have to pay for it." Since Taylor completed his annual budget in March, months before he was told his school would be using the America's Choice program, he noted, "There's no way we could budget for it. We are having to scrounge up money and re-allot money that we had [budgeted] for other things." During Interview 2 (November, 2001), Taylor stated that in the absence of funds to purchase materials required to operate the America's Choice program, "We have used funds from our media center and from a fundraiser that we did to buy materials that were

listed in [the America's Choice] brochures." He added, "but we haven't had any training in how to use them."

During Interview 3 (February, 2002), Taylor expressed concern about the financial burden required to pay for travel expenses to the mandatory America's Choice annual retreat, scheduled for later in February. He stated, "We have to pay for that out of our [school level budget]…I've rerouted some Title I funds to pay for it. It's required that we attend. The state doesn't pick up any of it." Asked what the communication had been regarding the purpose of the retreat, Taylor responded, "They haven't made me aware of anything that [the participants are] going to do."

Concerns about the effect of communication difficulties on instruction emerged during Interview 1 (September, 2001), when the principal stated:

> I've had to change the master schedule four or five times since school started. We don't know what to do. We have just started actually teaching [the students]. We are just about at the end of the [first] nine weeks. And we have been doing this program for two weeks because the rest of the time has been spent trying to figure out what they wanted. We just got the material last week that we were supposed to have in July. (Interview I, 261-275)

During subsequent interviews, Taylor again expressed concern about instruction regarding implementation of the America's Choice program in addition to the Success For All program, which previously had been in place at the school. Both were reading-based programs at Peck. During Interview 3 (February, 2002), Taylor expressed his concern that implementing both reading programs might have an adverse effect on student achievement in other academic areas, because the programs, "Cut into the time for teaching math, science, social studies, and other things like that. So you are trying to get [the other subjects] done in a smaller amount of time. We're expecting a slide

downward." The principal said, "I think our improvement will be less than it's been before," but emphasized that, despite communication barriers, "we will continue to do everything we can for the kids and make things improve, *despite* the [America's Choice] program."

Communication Between the Team Leader and Staff

Regarding interaction between the team leader and the staff, Taylor described sessions in which the team leader observed classrooms implementing the America's Choice program. Follow-up suggestions from the team leader's classroom observations were then presented to the Design Team, which oversaw implementation of America's Choice at the school site.

The issue of challenges with communication between the team leader and staff emerged during Interviews 2 and 3 (2001, 2002), when Taylor reported, "He doesn't give any correction to the staff. The only person[s] he'll talk to beside me are the assistant principal or the Design Team. He doesn't give the staff any kind of direction at all." According to Taylor, the lack of communication in this area led to staff apathy toward the team leader: "They pretty much ignore the team leader altogether." By Interview 3 (February, 2002), the principal reported that communication between the team leader and the staff had degenerated further. Taylor stated:

> They respond very negatively toward him…The feeling from the teachers is that they are not being able to do what they need to do….As far as my teachers on the Design Team, the Design Team regards him as a hindrance to what we are doing and my teachers regard him as a joke. (Interview 3, 207-210)

Communication Between the Principal and the Superintendent and Board of Education

The decision to invite the external, state school improvement team to Peck Elementary School as the method of intervention was made by Busbee County's school superintendent, who took office in 2001. With regard to the decision to implement the school improvement team, communication was reported to be non-existent between the superintendent and the principal. The principal learned of the decision in mid-May and attended a seminar on the America's Choice program along with the deputy superintendent at that time. Taylor described the position of the superintendent and central office during this period as being, "Do what you can. See if you can figure it out at the school level."

During Interview 1 (September 2001), Taylor said, "We're not getting much support. We're getting a 'See if you can figure it out and we'll ask you what you did later' type thing." The principal attributed this position to the fact that the superintendent "is new here. He's operating on what he hears from other people, I guess," adding, "We need to get better support from the board office." When asked to elaborate on what he meant by better support, the principal stated a specific need for moral support, such as "Hey you are doing a great job. You are working with a tough group of kids, but you're making headway," rather than, "Hey, you are making headway, but we will penalize you with a new program [to implement]."

Interview 2 (November, 2001) yielded slightly less information regarding communication challenges in this area; however, the principal stated:

> The superintendent and I have talked about the program- the various aspects and the progress we're seeing, and he's been over here to see the classrooms. There has been very positive communication [on that level].

> But he hasn't made any decisions about anything. He's trying to gather information. (Interview 2, 75-78)

The February Shift

During Interview 3 (February 2002), the principal spoke in great detail about levels of communication, as he had just returned from a February retreat with the superintendent, central office, staff, and Board of Education members. The retreat provided an opportunity for the principal to have an extensive and frank discussion with all present about the state school improvement team's intervention. Taylor reported, "They were very receptive to me telling them exactly what I thought about the situation with the different programs we do, especially America's Choice." The principal reported several follow-up phone calls and meetings with both the superintendent and members of the board following the retreat.

The improvement in communication with both the superintendent and the board following the retreat marked a pronounced shift in many areas regarding the school improvement team's intervention. Communication-wise, Taylor reported the opening of an active dialogue as a very positive experience, which allowed him to appeal for their considering other options beside the school improvement team as the primary means of recovering Peck Elementary School. The principal said:

> Before this, we felt that we were being pressed upon…that this program was put upon us against our will. Now, we have talked with the board…our board members…and our superintendent. And although we don't have a clear message from them that we are going to be free of this [the state school improvement team and the America's Choice and Success For All programs], we do feel like some of it, if not all of it, will be removed from us. And we feel pretty good about that. (Interview 3, 258-262)

Taylor identified previous difficulties on all levels of communication as having a major detrimental effect on the outcome of the school improvement team's intervention, summarizing his view as, "You have to have buy-in. That's the whole thing. And this program has had no buy-in."

By Interview 4 (April, 2002), the superintendent announced the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. After a series of candid meetings between the principal and the superintendent and board members, Taylor noted that quality communication between himself and the superintendent remained frequent and contributed to the superintendent's decision to discontinue the school improvement team intervention, the America's Choice program, and the Success For All program, which previously had been in place at Peck. Taylor reported that improved communication at this level "was vital. I think that without that kind of communication, we would still be looking at continuing the program for next year for sure. The Board of Education listened. And he [the superintendent] listened."

Conflict

The issue of conflict represented the second major challenge identified by the subject during data collection. Throughout all interviews, the theme of conflict, emerged between the principal and the team leader. Later interviews yielded reports of conflict between the principal and the state level representative of the school improvement team program. The area of conflict also affected mutual trust and cooperation. The presence of the theme of conflict was corroborated by fieldnotes and artifacts such as the Design

Team minutes. Design Team meeting minutes indicated impasses between the principal and school improvement team leader during meetings.

For the purpose of this study, conflict was defined as encompassing those situations in which communication degenerated to the point at which arguments or disagreements made further discussion counterproductive to the recovery process. Instances of conflict included outbursts, negative exchanges, and battles over power and control during the recovery process.

Conflict with the School Improvement Team Leader

Conflict first emerged within the data during Interview 1, along with difficulties in communication between the parties involved in implementation. The principal expressed frustration with having to deal with an external manager in spite of Peck's prior progress. The lack of principal, staff, or community input into the decision seemed to lead to a situation that bred suspicion and mistrust among the principal and staff. The principal and staff's lack of training in America's Choice, the vehicle of intervention, further created uncertainty as to what was to be expected of them during the recovery process. This was exacerbated in the principal's view by what he reported to be an equal lack of training in the America's Choice program for the team leader. When the team leader, an external agent heading the school improvement team, then began mandating change from his viewpoint, an "us versus them" environment developed. The "us versus them" perspective added to tension between the principal and the school improvement team leader. This point was evident during Interview 1 (September, 2001) in Taylor's statement, "I think it's going to backfire on them."

Conflict first emerged early in the process, and the principal described his interaction with the team leader. Taylor stated of the school improvement team leader:

> Mostly he sits around drinking coffee and talking. Irritating people. He can't seem to understand that he is not in charge of this school. He keeps telling me, 'Y'all need to change this or do that or make somebody else do this' or whatever. He used to be a principal and now he is not. (Interview 1, 628-632)

When asked about the situation created by this type of interaction with the team leader, Taylor said, "There is definitely a power conflict." Regarding Design Team meetings, Taylor said, "Usually, it turns into an argument about how we are going to do things. Basically, it's between [him and me] about how the school's going to be run."

As an example, Taylor cited a disagreement between the two regarding the interruption of classroom instruction by the team leader for the purpose of collecting random student survey data pertaining to America's Choice. The principal asked rhetorically, "If we're supposed to be improving instruction, why would you interrupt instruction to [ask questions]?" Taylor felt a better time to conduct student surveys would be, "while they're going to lunch, or while they're in the media center, or some other time when you're not interrupting teachers' lessons to do that." Taylor stated that the team leader's reaction to this suggestion surprised him. "He slammed his books down and said, 'Well, if you're not going to do the program, I might as well leave.' And I [Taylor] said, 'Bye.'" Taylor said he contacted the state representative of the school improvement team the following day to discuss the team leader's outburst.

Taylor reported that the meeting with the state level representative yielded little change in the interaction between himself and the team leader. According to Taylor, the February Shift, during which communication improved between the principal and the

superintendent and Board of Education, left him feeling more empowered to make decisions regarding the recovery process, despite the protests of the team leader. During Interview 3, the principal stated, "Usually [during Design team meetings, he tells] us how he wants it done, and when we say we don't want to do it that way, he usually gets mad and slams his books and walks out. This is still happening." Taylor's response was, "We don't care. We just carry on the meeting without him." The principal viewed the team leader as counterproductive, saying, "He really is detrimental to the process and does not help us a bit. He hinders the process." Taylor summarized the relationship, saying, "Most of the time, the relationship between [me and him] is cautiously hostile. He knows that I will ask him to leave the building if he blows up too much."

Conflict with the State Level Representative

The theme of conflict between the principal and the state level representative of the school improvement team emerged during Interview 2 (November 2001). Immediately after the team leader's book slamming incident, Taylor "contacted the person over the team leader…and asked that he either be removed or that his visits here be cut down so much that he would not interrupt our school anymore." In response to Taylor's contact, the state sent a representative to investigate the principal's complaints about the team leader. "His response to us was that he knows that the [America's Choice] program works, so if the test scores are lower than the previous year, it must be the principal's fault. It can't be the program's [fault]."

During Interview 3 (February, 2002), which took place after the February Shift in communication between the principal and the superintendent and Board of Education, Taylor noted that he and the Design Team had begun to feel empowered to amend the

America's Choice program at the school site according to what they felt would meet the students' needs. He said, "instead of going into the fifth grade, we are [expanding] it into the 3rd grade instead. And [we're] extending the time that we would have our trainers in the classroom. Instead of the two weeks [the team leader] wanted them, I left them in six weeks." Taylor added, "This changes their design a great deal, but it makes it work for us." The principal noted that the state level representative of the school improvement team "didn't care for it at all." Taylor indicated:

> The [state level representative of the school improvement team program] says, 'No. You've got to do this and this and this' based on a time table that they have, which has no reality in our school at all…It's something that came from wherever the program came from…but it doesn't have any real basis in our school. So [now] we're making decisions based on our [position] and we're getting complaints from the state. (Interview 3, 153-160)

Maintaining Staff Morale

During all interviews, the principal listed the maintenance of staff morale as a major challenge during the first year of the recovery process. He initially described the staff as one which "take[s] great pride in their teaching and their mission in the first place. They are very strong in that." Taylor attributed challenges in maintaining morale during the first year as resulting from the lack of staff input into the decision to implement an outside intervention despite demonstrated progress on student achievement scores during the previous two consecutive school years.

When questioned about the intervention's effect on the staff during Interview 1, Taylor reported, "My teachers were somewhat upset. They took it personally. Many of them said things like, 'We're doing everything we can and we are having a good bit of

success. What is it they want?' referring to the board office." Taylor elaborated on the teachers' view, stating,

> You are the only school coming up [in student achievement test scores] in our whole district. You are the only one showing growth, and then to be told that you are not doing well was like a slap in the face to them. Many of them resented it greatly. (Interview 1, 442-446)

Despite Taylor's efforts to improve morale and rally the staff, he noted, "They were upset and they're still upset." The principal also noticed a change in the "feel" of the staff, saying, "We had very good morale last year that had been steadily building for two years. This year, everyone is pretty well reserved." This issue, according to Taylor, caused the teachers to "tighten into each other more," meaning the staff became leery of outside interventions into the school setting.

Taylor's strategy to address the morale issues among the staff was to ensure that they were as well-informed about the school improvement team's intervention process and the America's Choice program as he could make them. His efforts to keep open lines of communication with the staff were described as his, " being very open with my teachers. I will tell them everything that's going on. I am not holding back." He attributed this frankness with the staff as having "helped a majority of them to pull with me," adding, "I tell them whenever I get any information what I know at that point. And they know I'll do that." Staff polarization was a related theme that also emerged early in the data collection process. Taylor noted, "because some members of the faculty [were] being called upon to institute the programs, they are kind of being polarized from that. It's having a bad effect on those who are being required to do certain things with [the school improvement team]."

Staff polarization due to the fact that the America's Choice program was being implemented on top of the Success For All program reemerged during Interview 2 (November 2001), when the principal found inconsistencies in the implementation of the America's Choice program and the Success For All program, which had been in place prior to the current year. The added burden of operating both reading programs simultaneously had a negative effect on morale. The principal noted a problem inherent in the attempt to blend the two different reading programs, noting, "They're not compatible at all. There's no way to blend them at all," and Taylor stated:

> This has polarized us because now [teachers] realize that you can't really do both programs, so some are putting more emphasis on Success For All while some are putting more emphasis on America's Choice and they are neglecting the other program to a degree. (Interview 2, 264-269)

Taylor viewed this situation as putting the burden of sorting out what was being taught in each class on him, reporting, "then I have to go in and be the villain and say, 'No. This is the way you will do Success For All,' and 'This is the way you will do America's Choice.'"

The middle of the school year found the staff speculating on the future of these two "very different" programs. Staff polarization pertaining to the differences in the reading programs (Success For All and America's Choice) also resulted in a spilt within the faculty about which, if any, program they felt should be continued. Taylor reported that some of the teachers who had been accustomed to Success For All became "apprehensive about the future of Success For All," while, "Other people are apprehensive about the future of America's Choice." Still, Taylor said, "I think most people would prefer to drop them both and go with the idea of, 'Let's meet the needs of these students and forget about these programs.'"

The effects of the decline in staff morale, coupled with an increase in staff polarization, were major concerns for the principal during the first year of recovery. He summarized the challenges pertaining to staff morale as follows:

> I'm very much a believer that if you give good teachers direction, that they will do a good job. When I came in two years ago and started giving them direction on targeting instruction to the needs of the students in their particular classrooms, they did an outstanding job the first year. The second year they did even better…they had great growth [in scores]. Now they are being given programs that say, "Do this, do this." They don't know where to go. So they are losing the direction. And they are losing the focus on good teaching. And they're trying to do too many things to make people happy instead of looking at what the kids need. (Interview 2, 306-316)

While the long-term impact on staff morale during the first year of recovery would not become known until the close of the school system's period for teacher transfers for the coming school year, Taylor anticipated more than one teacher request for transfer away from Peck Elementary School. He admitted, "I've had several teachers tell me that they would look for other places to go. And with the teacher shortage, they will be able to go to any system they want to go to." He said that teachers are selling a service and recognized that for them, "It's a sellers' market."

Data from Interview 3 (February, 2002) provided additional insight into the future employment plans of a number of staff members, as several teachers indicated their decision whether to remain at Peck or transfer elsewhere would coincide with the county's decision whether to retain the school improvement team and the America's Choice program during the following school year. Taylor stated, "I have had a number of teachers tell me that if we're going to do this [the school improvement team and America's Choice program] next year, to let them know, because they'd like to move on."

The February Shift, which found greater communication between the principal and the superintendent and Board of Education regarding school level difficulties in working with the school improvement team, seemed to provide a morale boost among the staff. When informed by Taylor that he had been meeting with the superintendent and board members to discuss alternatives to continuing the school improvement team and America's Choice program during the coming school year, the staff was, "very happy about that." Taylor also credited the voicing of individual staff members' concerns to their own representatives on the Board of Education with assisting in informing the board of the school's difficulties during the first year of recovery, stating, "I think they're part of it. They're talking to some board members about it." The principal recognized the emergence of hope for possible change resulting from the February Shift as having, "improved staff morale a great deal." Still, he acknowledged that morale was, "not as good as last year due to the [school improvement team and America's Choice] program."

By Interview 4 (March, 2002), the superintendent had announced the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. Taylor saw this announcement as facilitating a shift in staff morale, saying, "I think it will go a long way toward helping mend the polarization among faculty because of these programs. I think it's pulling us back together knowing that they're getting rid of the programs. They [the staff] were demoralized." When the decision to abandon America's Choice and the school improvement team was announced to the faculty, Taylor reported, "Their battle cry was, 'Free at last…free at last!'" This evidenced what Taylor summarized was a new found state of "very good" morale.

Still, during Interview 4 (March, 2002), the principal reflected on the difficulty of trying to encourage staff morale during the intervention of the school improvement team and America's Choice program. He said, "It's very challenging to try to hold the faculty together when they are feeling so much pressure, so much frustration, and so much demoralization."

Time Management

The issue of time management was reported by the subject to be a major challenge throughout the process. The principal noted that the implementation of the school improvement team intervention and the America's Choice program yielded an increase in duties and time demands on both the staff and himself.

The Principal and Time

Throughout the interview process, the principal noted that time was one of his most precious commodities. Emphasizing that the duties of being a school principal had always been demanding on time, he found that managing time during the first year of recovery was even more demanding due to additional duties associated with the implementation of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. During Interview 1 (September, 2001), Taylor recalled hours he spent during the previous summer to acquaint himself with the school improvement team, its procedures, the team leader, and the America's Choice program. He spent three days at an America's Choice training session in St. Simons, Georgia. Additional training was scheduled throughout the school year but was later postponed, abbreviated, or cancelled, which Taylor reported left him with a great deal of rescheduling. In addition, Taylor was required to schedule eight, one-hour staff training sessions on the America's Choice program.

Scheduling the program into the school day demanded more time. During Interview 1 (September, 2001), Taylor stated, "I had to figure out where I was going to try to put this program in the school day and still have our other programs that we run." Taylor indicated the task was complicated by the fact that he already had several programs to schedule: "Currently, we are running Success For All, the 21st Century Program, The Three O'Clock Project, and the state after school program. We are running all of these things and then we added another program to it." His chief time difficulty with the America's Choice program at the onset was, "trying to find a part of the day where teachers can do what they do best…teach, instead of following a script."

Additional scheduling issues were reported as being related to difficulties in setting a schedule that the school improvement team felt as adequate for the America's Choice program. Taylor noted, "I set the schedule in July and had everybody in classes and figured out what [the teachers] would be teaching at what time and then had to redo the schedule in August. I think we are on the fourth master schedule." By November, Taylor said, "We finally came up with a schedule that we thought would work. We built in some skills periods anticipating that we'd need that. It had to have a few alterations in it, but nothing drastic, so it's fitting pretty well into the schedule."

The America's Choice program also demanded time for planning and setting up additional meetings with the staff, and in planning and scheduling major fundraisers, such as the Twenty-five Book campaign, an element of the program designed to raise money for the purchase of literary components of the America's Choice reading program. One of the fundraisers, the Twenty-five Book Campaign, placed a great demand on the principal's time, as he "invited the community in and talked about the program in general

terms and what we're going to be doing with it." Taylor scheduled and set up a carnival for "about 500 people." Though the carnival raised nearly $3500, Taylor noted the task demanded many man-hours.

One of the benefits of the America's Choice program, according to Taylor, was a component requiring him to, "Spend a lot more time in the classroom, which I enjoy doing, so it kind of works for me as well as against me."

Taylor added:

> It [the America's Choice program] does make me have to do more things after hours and on weekends. Things…I would normally get done sometime during the day or at the end of the day… where I'm now having to reschedule a lot of my [duties] during the day so that I'm in the classroom doing things. I enjoy them. I enjoy reading to the students. (Interview 2, 242-249)

The requirements for principal involvement in the classroom demanded a substantial amount of time during the work day, according to Taylor, who said, "The America's Choice program requires that you spend an hour a day in the classrooms. The Success For All program requires an hour and a half, so if you do them both, it requires that you spend two and a half-hours a day in the classroom, which is hard to do on some days."

The principal attributed the largest increase in time demands to the extensive documentation of student progress required by the America's Choice Program. Taylor reported:

> My work has probably increased ten-fold because I have to report the progress of each student on each standard and each substandard by individual student and the progress during the year. When you multiply that by 543, I spend hours and hours compiling data. It has to be done every two weeks. (Interview 2, 257-261)

Taylor characterized the additional time demands as constant, reporting the America's Choice program, "has added quite a bit. I've had to change many things from how I'd

normally do them. But basically, it's added a lot of paperwork for me, a lot more planning, [and] changing things around." During Interview 4 (March 2002), the principal summarized the challenges affecting time management:

> There's been a great deal added to what I would normally do and there's been a great deal that was not productive. I've spent a lot of time going to meetings that were nonproductive and trying to find information on the program that they refused to give me. So I've spent a lot of time doing things that were not in the interest of improving education at our school. (Interview 4, 104-108)

Prior to Interview 4 (March, 2002), the superintendent announced the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. Taylor noted that this announcement, while welcomed by his staff and himself, indicated a demand for him to further increase his time on the job, due to the responsibilities of establishing his own program to replace the America's Choice and Success For All programs at the school. He acknowledged, "I will spend at least two to three times the amount of time I would normally working during this summer to help formulate a new program to take up the slack from where this other one [America's Choice] left us."

Staff and Time

Similar to the demands on the principal's time, time demands for teachers were reported as equally sizeable. Throughout the data collection process, Taylor reported the largest time demands for teachers as being related to scheduling, familiarization and preparation of learning materials pertaining to the America's Choice program, mandatory attendance at after hours meetings related to the program's training, and additional time spent evaluating student progress.

The implementation of the America's Choice program required outside training for lead teachers who would then redeliver the training to other teachers. During Interview 2 (November, 2001), Taylor described the situation as busy, stating:

> Well, the way it works is that two teachers [who] are rolling out the program in the fourth grade are themselves rolling out in the 5th grade at a different time during the day. So we've had some meetings with the 5th grade teachers to try to make them less apprehensive about what's going to occur. And those teachers who have some experience with the 4th grade level are now doing the same thing with the 5th grade. They are also continuing to roll it out in the 4th grade, so they're quite busy. (Interview 2, 77-84)

An example of additional demands on teacher time emerged during Interview 3 (February, 2002), in which Taylor discussed the implementation of additional student achievement testing required by the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. According to Taylor:

> One example would be our team leader came in with a requirement from the state that [mandated] we are to give a practice CRCT test the first week in February. They supplied us with the books but did not have answer sheets or any way of scoring [the test]. So they wanted us to hand score all of the CRCT tests that we were to give as the practice test. (Interview 3, 202-207)

The situation was resolved when the principal purchased Scantron score sheets and borrowed a Scantron machine from another school, much to the relief of his teachers. Illustrating his perspective on the additional time demands on his staff regarding student achievement testing, Taylor emphasized:

> I have no problem with that, except that now they want us to do it two more times. There's no reason we should do it because we already know where we are. They wanted us to do another one next Monday after having already done one this week… This takes a lot of work on our part, and if it had not been for the use of the Scantron from the high school, we'd have to have done all of these things by hand. This would have added a tremendous load to what [the teachers] already do. (Interview 3, 208-216)

The result of the added time demands on staff caused some teachers to re-evaluate their teaching plans for the following year. Taylor commented, "I have had a number of teachers tell me that if we're going to do this [the school improvement team and America's Choice program] next year, to let them know, because they'd like to move on."

By Interview 4 (March, 2002), the superintendent had announced the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. Taylor emphasized that the creation of a school-designed program to replace the America's Choice and Success For All programs would increase further the time demands on the staff, but added, "They want to do it."

Additional Challenges

Additional challenges were reported during the interview process, emerging in only one interview each. These challenges included facility management and community perspective leading to student withdrawal. The nature of these challenges is important as they affected the principal's ability to implement recovery.

Facility Management

Taylor responded in the affirmative when asked if the school facility had an impact on the principal's ability to implement the school improvement team's intervention. The facility was built as a junior high school in the 1960s, and was converted to house the elementary school in the 1980s. During Interview 2 (November, 2001), the principal stated, "The classrooms are too small to accommodate the way that it's supposed to be set up for America's Choice. We don't have room to put up the tables for the centers. So what's happening is we're having to bunch everything up and it's

creating some problems." Taylor described the shortage of classroom space, saying, "We're using every room we have, every period of the day. The rooms aren't big enough. We don't have enough rooms."

Regarding specific attributes of the facility, Taylor expressed his concern with the absence of natural light in all of the buildings. He explained, "In the front of the building we do have skylights in the hallways for natural light. In the [rear] building and in the annexes, they don't have those skylights and they're dark. We've been fighting for three years trying to get natural light."

During Interview 2 (November, 2001), Taylor was asked if the process of turning around the low-performing school would be different if the facilities were more adequate, to which he responded, "Much different. I think it would be received a lot better by the teachers if we had enough room to create the [learning] stations that [the school improvement team] is asking for." Even though this interchange marked the only occasion in which the principal reported facility challenges in the data, it was assumed that the challenges associated with the poor and inadequate facility were constant throughout the first year of the recovery process.

Community Perspective Leading to Student Withdrawal

During Interview 1 (September, 2001), the principal noted a concern regarding community perspectives on the changes at Peck. He described the community's reaction to the re-emergence of the low-performing label associated with the news of the invitation of the school improvement team as "shocked," given the school's published progress during the previous two years. Taylor said:

> There was a great deal of surprise, because we had been publishing our test results showing how much we were improving. We'd made that an

> open thing to them…See how your kids are doing. See how much they're improving over the previous years. I think it came as a big surprise for them to hear of the school as being put down as a low achieving school. (Interview 1, 74-78)

He stated, "I think it is all in the perception that the school is negative."

According to Taylor, one of the side effects of the re-emergence of the low-performing label was a series of approximately 20 withdrawals. He attributed this to the community's perspective that the decision to implement an external, state school improvement team at Peck was tantamount to an admission that the school was poor despite the progress in test scores made during the previous two years. Taylor explained:

> Some of the students have withdrawn to go to a private school in the area, [and] a few have gone to another elementary school…In the community, when they see [the low-performing label], they don't understand. They understand it when you say that the average student has gone up by ten percent, [though they also] understand [the negative impact of the school's being] classified as low-performing. That, they understand, so they pull their kids out. (Interview 1, 509-514)

Section Summary

The first year of the recovery process found the principal encountering a number of challenges and barriers during the implementation of the external, state school improvement team and the America's Choice program. Challenges and barriers in daily communication were reported throughout the data collection process. Communication issues arose with regard to the principal's relationship with the superintendent and the Board of Education, the school improvement team, its team leader, and the state level representative of the school improvement team. This finding was also consistent with that of Steyn and Squelch (1994), who noted a strong potential for problems in communication during restructuring efforts.

The second major challenge for the principal lay in dealing with situations of conflict with the school improvement team leader and with the state representative. Dimmock (1999) reported a similar challenge for the principal during a similar change effort, noting a power struggle in which the principal found himself at odds with management of the school system. In the present study, conflict was defined as encompassing situations in which communication between parties degenerated to a point at which arguments or disagreements made further discussion counterproductive to the recovery process.

The third major challenge that faced the principal was the maintenance of staff morale during the recovery process. The principal tied the emergence of morale issues to the lack of staff input on the decision to implement the state school improvement team. He reported the primary elements of low morale as including teacher suspicion, frustration in staff dealings with the school improvement team leader, and a state of demoralization accompanying the feeling that they were being punished despite demonstrated progress on student achievement tests during the two years prior to the intervention. The eventual effects of the decline in morale led several teachers to vocalize their consideration of employment elsewhere during the following school year.

Finally, the principal reported time management demands as a major challenge during the first year of recovery. The intervention of the school improvement team called for added documentation and paperwork, additional training, and a host of class scheduling changes. This challenge was consistent with the findings of Koury (2000), which chronicled principals' difficulties with time management during reconstitution in San Francisco. In addition, the principal in the present study reported a lack of sufficient

time for teachers to teach students in all academic subjects, due to the America's Choice program's demand for extended classroom time in reading.

Additional challenges emerged during the data collection process, including the necessity of dealing with an outdated and inadequate facility, which hindered implementation of the program, as well as negative community perspectives of the school, which reportedly resulted in the withdrawal of approximately 20 students.

The Principal's View of the Intervention Itself

The second question sought to uncover the principal's perspectives on the intervention of the external, state school improvement team, which included the implementation of the America's Choice program, the team's interaction with the school, and the principal's interaction with the school improvement team leader. Donald Taylor, principal of Peck Elementary School, viewed the school improvement team as an "intrusion." He further reported that the presence of the school improvement team was an affront to him, his staff, and students by the Board of Education, central office, and superintendent. An additional challenge was reported to be the principal's lack of confidence in the America's Choice program, the vehicle by which the school improvement team attempted to recover the school.

Context of the Intervention

Before discussing the principal's view of the intervention, it is first necessary to summarize the context surrounding the decision to implement the external, state school improvement team as the agent of recovery at Peck Elementary School. Principal Donald Taylor assumed the helm of Peck Elementary School prior to the 1999-2000 school year. He said during Interview 1 (September, 2001), "I came in a few years ago and we

instituted targeted learning…targeted instruction and our scores started coming up. The first year, they came up a good bit and the second year, we showed tremendous gains on tests." Taylor summarized the progress made by the school during his first two years, stating:

> We have been showing progress. We had taken a school that had been steadfastly declining on standardized tests and morale and everything else over a number of years, and the first year I was here [1999-2000], our scores went up in every area except reading… In the second year, we went up approximately ten percent in every area except math. In math we went up ten percent. So we were still showing growth. (Interview 1, 204-210)

During Interview 2 (November 2001), Taylor elaborated on the progress made during his second year as Peck's principal, 2000-2001, saying, "We improved in reading by ten percent from [the previous] year, eight percent in language arts, and three percent in math, and we're the only school in the county that did that." (See Figure 4-1).

Taylor described his initial interaction with the school improvement team in spring, 2001. The principal said, "We invited a school improvement review team to come in at the end of April to do a review of the school. There were eight members of the team, and they spent eight days here reviewing the school" for what Taylor believed was the purpose of making suggestions. Taylor noted that he was surprised when, "at the end of the year we were given a directive from the central office that we should take on the school improvement team's America's Choice program. It wasn't our suggestion. It was handed to us. 'You will do this.'"

An Affront

The principal viewed the intervention of the school improvement team as an affront to his leadership as well as to the hard work of his staff. He attributed this view to the fact that Peck Elementary School had demonstrated greater progress in student

achievement as measured by the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) scores than every other school in the Busbee County school system. In light of the demonstrated progress, Taylor said the mandate from the central office that Peck would take on the school improvement team was, "kind of a slap in the face to what we had been doing and to our teachers." Taylor continually reemphasized the context of Peck's progress prior to the intervention throughout each of the four interviews. Taylor's view that the intervention was an affront to his teachers was evident in his statement, "They take great pride in their teaching and their mission in the first place. They are very strong in that…It's having a bad effect."

As the school year unfolded, the principal became increasingly mobilized against the school improvement team and its team leader. When asked during Interview 3 how the school improvement team had affected his power base, the principal stated, "It's undermined it somewhat. But I think that my teachers already know me well enough to know that I will not turn [the school] over to the improvement team or the state people."

Taylor explained that a chief reason for his taking offense to the intervention of the program had to do with the program's not being "sold" to him or the staff prior to implementation. He summarized the views of both himself and the staff toward the school improvement team as follows:

> If you take a program and you force it onto a school, it's not going to be good for the program and it's not going to be good for the school. You've got to have everybody on board thinking that this is something that you need, or it's going to end up being detrimental in the long run…We had our targeted instruction and it was working. They [the staff] could see it working. Then you bring in a program [America's Choice] that has no evidence that it ever worked, and throw it on them. It had nothing but a detrimental effect. You have to have buy-in. That's the whole thing. And this program has had no buy-in. (Interview 3, 485-496)

During Interview 4 (March, 2002), Taylor discussed what he identified to be critical errors in the approach of the school improvement team. Taylor noted the school improvement team leader's demeanor at the on set of the intervention "was somewhat hostile and overbearing. It was not a very professional or collaborative way of putting [the America's Choice program] in."

Prior to Interview 4 (March, 2002), the decision had been made by the Board of Education to abandon the school improvement team and America's Choice program. In retrospect, the principal suggested the intervention might have had more of a positive impact with a more effective approach:

> I would say, first of all, change how you go in to initially talk to the teachers and administrators. Change the approach to more of a fact-finding basis. Get people [on school improvement teams] who will be viewed as actually concerned about instruction rather that concerned about their jobs. I would tell the state not to force [the school improvement team] down our throats. See if [school site leaders] want the help, then offer it. If they don't, then offer to help them in some other way. (Interview 4, 175-181)

An Intrusion

In addition to the principal's view of the introduction of the school improvement team as an affront, he also expressed the view that the school improvement team's intervention was an intrusion. Throughout the data collection process, Taylor expressed the view that the school improvement team was interfering with Peck's continuing improvement in student achievement. He said during Interview 3 (February, 2002), "We had things going well. They [the school improvement team]…wanted to jump on a program that was doing well to make them look good." He stated, "the school intervention team- that's what they are- [is] intervening in what we're already doing successfully… They've come in and messed that up."

Taylor reported that the staff also felt intruded upon, saying, "They see [the school improvement team] coming in and they react in a very negative way. Because it is not asking them for their opinions on the things that may work with some of our kids, It's shoving something down their throats." He said staff reaction to the intervention led to unwillingness to work with the school improvement team: "If it comes from the school improvement team, they don't want it."

Lack of Confidence in the Intervention

Throughout data collection, the principal reported that a lack of confidence in both the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. Taylor attributed the lack of confidence to the following reasons:

1) Lack of "buy-in" by the school staff prior to implementation.

Because the staff viewed the improvement of student test scores over the two years prior to the intervention as progress, the staff was not "sold" on the idea that student performance had reached the point where outside intervention was necessary.

2) Lack of information and training in the America's Choice program.

The principal expressed frustration with what he perceived to be a lack of sufficient training in the program. He also noted frustration with the lack of assistance from the state when trying to arrange visitations at other sites operating the America's Choice program. During Interview 2 (November, 2001), he stated, "I'm supposed to try and sell [the teachers] on the program. But that doesn't work because I don't know enough about the program to sell it."

3) Lack of funding for mandated elements of the America's Choice program.

The principal expressed frustration with having to purchase essential materials and supplies necessary to initiate the program despite the fact that there was no money budgeted to purchase such supplies. As a result, he reported having to juggle his budget and divert money allocated for other expenses to purchase supplies for the America's Choice program. He summarized, "I think funding would be one of the biggest [challenges]. We were not given any money to run the program."

4) Lack of clearly defined roles during the program's implementation.

The principal reported disagreement between himself and the school improvement team leader with regard to which of them was to be in charge of the site during the implementation of the America's Choice program. Taylor reported that his relationship with the school improvement team leader became "a power struggle." This relationship showed little improvement as the school year progressed. During Interview 3 (February, 2002), he stated, "I'm in charge of the school. And I refuse to let anybody else take that role."

Section Summary

Throughout data collection, the principal expressed the view that the intervention of the school improvement team was an affront to both his staff and himself, due to its mandated presence despite demonstrated progress during the two years prior to the intervention. Taylor also viewed the nature of the intervention as intrusive and as interfering with the Peck staff's attempts to better student achievement. Both the affront and intrusion were exacerbated by difficulties in communication and cooperation between the principal and the school improvement team leader. This finding was similar

to that of Dimmock (1999), who also noted the emergence of conflict among leaders during school restructuring in Australia.

Finally, the principal reported that the intervention lacked a key element necessary for success: confidence in the intervention itself. He emphasized that confidence in the intervention was lacking on the parts of his staff and himself due to 1) the lack of buy-in by the school staff prior to implementation; 2) a lack of information and sufficient training in the America's Choice Program, the vehicle of the intervention; 3) the lack of financial support to fund required elements of the program; and 4) the lack of clearly defined roles for the key players during the intervention. Consistent with this final point, Dimmock (1999) also found difficulties in clarity regarding which decisions were to be left to site-based management versus which were to be dictated by the school system in his study of a principal facing school restructuring in Australia.

Effects of the Recovery Process on the Principal

The third question sought to uncover the effects of the recovery process on the principal during the first year of the implementation of the external, state school improvement team at Peck Elementary School. The effects the recovery process had on Donald Taylor, principal of Peck Elementary School, included his questioning of his role in the process, a lack of confidence in both himself and the school system, and his questioning his own future at the school. This was demonstrated by the principal's exploration of employment opportunities elsewhere during of the first year of recovery. Fieldnotes and artifacts further corroborated these themes.

Questioning His Role

Because he was not a party in the decision to implement the school improvement team at Peck Elementary School, Taylor reported that he was unclear of his role from the onset of the recovery process. During Interview 1 (September, 2001), data indicated that the intervention was affecting Taylor personally in the statement, "I guess it hurt my pride that my school is being classified this way, even though [we] are working hard."

Taylor reported a feeling that the central office's decision reflected a lack of confidence in his ability to manage the school. "To be told that we were going to have a school improvement team come in and tell us how to [operate] better," said Taylor, "was kind of a slap in the face to what we had been doing and to our teachers." His response to staff questions about the reasons for the decision to implement the school improvement team was to keep them as informed as possible. Despite his personal reservations about the intervention, he vowed, "I will tell them everything that is going on. I am not holding it back."

According to Taylor, the lack of clearly defined roles made it difficult to foster mutual trust between him and the school improvement team leader. After the emergence of disagreements between the two parties over methods of implementing the America's Choice program, a power struggle developed rapidly. As the school year progressed, the power struggle grew into a state of hostility between the principal and the school improvement team leader. From this situation emerged a state of conflict that would characterize their relationship for the remainder of the first year of the recovery process.

When Taylor attempted to gather more information on the America's Choice program during a three-day workshop before the beginning of the school year, he grew

frustrated when he and the deputy superintendent returned, "knowing very little more than when we left…none of us knew anything about the program." Again, Taylor reported difficulty in defining his role in the process, admitting, "We are not getting much support." Taylor reported he was puzzled further by his role in implementing the America's Choice program when he contacted a representative at the state level in an attempt to obtain more information about the program. Taylor reported he was told, "It's too big a thing for you to understand. We'll let you know what you need to know when you need to know it."

Feeling backed into a corner, Taylor's chosen response to the uncertainty regarding his new role was to assert himself as the sole leader of Peck. Referring to the school improvement team leader in September, 2001, the principal stated, "He can't seem to understand that he is not in charge of the school." By November, after an incident in which the school improvement team leader lost his temper during a Design Team meeting, Taylor felt the need to contact a state level representative. The principal said he "asked that [the school improvement team leader] either be removed or that his visits here be cut down so much that he would not interrupt our school anymore." By February of the school year, the relationship had degenerated to the point that Taylor characterized his relationship with the school improvement team leader as, "cautiously hostile." During Interview 4 (March, 2002), after the superintendent's announcement of the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program, Taylor noted, " Yesterday [the school improvement team leader] didn't even make it to the meeting."

Lack of Confidence

"I was very disappointed" that the superintendent elected to have the school improvement team begin its intervention at Peck Elementary School, reported Taylor during Interview 1 (September, 2001), "because we were still showing growth." The principal viewed the intervention as a let down in light of to his school's demonstrated progress on student achievement tests during the first two years of his administration. He reported, "We had very good morale last year that had steadily been building for two years." Taylor continued, "It has definitely affected the morale of the school."

During Interview 2 (November, 2001), Taylor reported an inner struggle that accompanied his role in managing and implementing a program in which he lacked confidence. Referring to his interaction with his teachers, Taylor said, "I have to correct someone in a program I may not be endorsing myself. And that's a problem for me." Taylor reported he felt "demoralized" while watching his teachers struggle with what he viewed as the demands placed upon them by the untested America's Choice program. Taylor said that situations such as this also presented him with a philosophical dilemma. Fieldnotes indicated facial expressions of physical pain as he stated:

> I am very much a believer that if you give good teachers direction, they will do a good job…Now they are being given [the America's Choice and Success For All] programs that say, 'Do this, do this.' They don't know where to go. So they are losing the direction. And they are losing the focus on good teaching. And they're trying to do too many things to make people happy instead of looking at what the kids need. (Interview 2, 306-316)

When asked how this made him feel during a follow-up question, Taylor appeared dejected, stating, "It irritates me because I know we have good teachers. And I know that

they put everything they can into every day they teach. And to see them not being able to do that and their being confused by that, it really bothers me."

As further evidence of a lack of confidence in his new role, in February Taylor stated that the presence of the school improvement team had eroded his role as the instructional leader of Peck Elementary School. He previously had expressed his feelings on both the importance of, and his affinity for, the instructional role of the principal. During Interview 1 (September, 2001), he stated, "My view of the principal is that you are a teacher [with] a broader base of students." During Interview 3 (February, 2002), Taylor again expressed disappointment in what he identified as his diminished role in instruction when he shrugged his shoulders and said, "If you have a school improvement team in [your school], you might as well just be a manager of facilities." He summarized his view during Interview 4 (March, 2002):

> It makes it so that it's not worthwhile. To change from someone who is used to directing curriculum and instructional programs to someone who is just jumping through hoops for some program that somebody bought somewhere…you're not an instructional leader at that point. (Interview 4, 119-122)

Questioning His Future at Peck Elementary School

Taylor's experiences during the first year of recovery led to uncertainty regarding his role in Peck Elementary School's future. Fieldnotes indicated many non-verbal cues throughout the interview process, such as the principal's wringing of his hands and the presence of dejected facial expressions at those points during the interviews in which he spoke of the effect the first year of recovery was having on him personally. His facial expressions appeared to the researcher to reflect worry and anxiety as he recounted his

experiences. Fieldnotes indicated that at various points during the data collection process Taylor exhibited other emotions, such as anger and a sense of loss.

During Interview 1 (September, 2001), Taylor reported that the intervention "makes me feel that if I can't turn it around in their opinion [then] I need to go elsewhere." He elaborated, "I have been thinking very seriously this year of taking on a different job. For me personally, I have talked to several people who I have worked with in the past in other parts of the state, who tell me, 'I've got a job here. You can have it.'" The principal discussed his personal frustration during Interview 1, reporting, "I think that no matter what we do to improve, the state and local [boards of education] won't accept the improvement. They will give us more to do."

As data collection progressed, the principal exhibited a variety of different emotions, ranging from enthusiasm to anger to a sense of depression characterized by a flat affect. During September and November (2001), Taylor seemed to have resigned himself to the idea that his prospects for a future at Peck Elementary School were fading. During Interviews 2 (2001) and 3 (2002), he mentioned that he had been inquiring about available principal positions in other parts of the state. Taylor admitted that the process of recovery by means of the school improvement team "has had a major effect on me. It's one of those things that makes you question whether you want to be a principal, especially a principal in a school that's going to have [a school improvement team and the America's Choice program]." During Interview 4 (March 2002), Taylor stated, "It had pretty much gotten to the point that I was looking for a job elsewhere- any place that wouldn't have to do these programs."

In contrast, during the February Shift, when communication with the superintendent and Board of Education had improved and Taylor felt that he had a receptive audience to hear his concerns about the school improvement team and America's Choice program, Taylor exhibited a visible heartening of spirit. During Interview 3 (February, 2002), which coincided with the February Shift, Taylor seemed upbeat and hopeful when discussing his future at Peck. He stated, "I feel like someone is finally listening to me and cares about this situation." Fieldnotes indicated Taylor's physical responses changed when he spoke of the improvement of communication with his superiors. His affect brightened. His gestures and mannerisms were open and relaxed. He appeared confident.

Interview 4 (March 2002) found the principal in an upbeat mood, due to the superintendent's announcement of the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. Taylor reflected on the effect the first year of recovery had on him both personally and professionally:

> Professionally, I'd say that it was a stunting experience. Instead of growing with another year of expertise in curriculum and in what our kids need, I was spinning my wheels the whole year. Frustrated. I knew everybody was going to be much more excited when everything was removed. I feel vindicated. We have shown that we can do what we need to do and we don't need somebody looking over our shoulders. The whole process to me was a useless waste of time and effort. I resent it very deeply. I think it took a year out of my students' educational lives. I think it took a year out of my teachers' growth. And it has been a stunting experience for me. Just a total waste of time. (Interview 4, 201-209)

Taylor stated that the "damage" done by the school improvement team and America's Choice programs during the first year translated into a number of additional duties for him and the staff, as they would have to find ways to circumvent the damage. Still, said

Taylor, he was relieved that the school improvement team and America's Choice programs were being discontinued, and he welcomed the challenge of developing a site-based program of recovery during the coming year.

Section Summary

The recovery process showed a range of effects on the principal. The effects, often emotional, were characterized under three main areas. First, the principal questioned his role during the process of implementing the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. As data collection progressed, disagreements with the school improvement team leader over power led to conflict and ultimately hostility between the two. This finding supports that of Dimmock (1999), who noted a similar power struggle between the principal and system management in a study in Australia. The principal in the current study also expressed a great deal of frustration in his attempts to access information, training, and implementation procedures pertaining to the America's Choice program.

Second, the principal perceived a lack of confidence in his leadership abilities, due to the decision at the central office level to adopt the intervention of the school improvement team, despite the school's gains on student achievement test scores during the first two years of his administration. He noted that the presence of the school improvement team eroded the hard won morale of his teachers. The principal expressed disappointment in his diminished role as instructional leader. He also faced a moral dilemma surrounding the need to hold staff members accountable for the implementation of a curriculum in which he himself lacked confidence.

Finally, the principal questioned his future as the leader of Peck Elementary School. As data collection progressed, the principal exhibited a variety of different emotions, ranging from enthusiasm to anger to a sense of depression characterized by a flat affect. This supported the findings of Koury (2000), who also noted the presence of physical and emotional effects on principals during school reform. Fieldnotes documented physical facial expressions including worry, anxiety, anger, and a sense of loss. At other times, such as during the February Shift, when communication with the superintendent and Board of Education had improved and Taylor felt that he had a receptive audience to hear his concerns about the school improvement team and America's Choice program, the principal exhibited a visible heartening of spirit. By Interview 4 (March, 2002), after the superintendent announced the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program, the principal reported he was relieved and "felt vindicated."

The Principal's Perspectives on the State of the School
at the Conclusion of the First Year of Recovery

The fourth question sought to uncover the perspectives of Donald Taylor, principal of Peck Elementary School, on the state of the school at the conclusion of the first year of the recovery process, which included the intervention of the external, state school improvement team and its administration of the America's Choice program as the vehicle of recovery. The principal's perspective of the state of Peck Elementary after the first year of this intervention included a fear of weaker student scores on achievement tests as well as the view that the recovery process had a negative emotional impact on the school's perception of itself, as expressed by the staff. The principal further viewed the

state of the school as "damaged," due to the experience of dealing with the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. Fieldnotes and artifacts further corroborated these themes.

Fear of a Negative Impact on Student Achievement

Throughout data collection, the principal expressed concern that the momentum behind Peck's two years of improvement on student achievement tests might be interrupted or reversed due to the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. He feared a negative impact on student achievement due to a hindrance of instruction caused by the lack of training and materials pertaining to the America's Choice program. He also attributed this fear to the program's interrupting the staff's established focus on student achievement through targeted instruction.

Taylor viewed the school improvement team's presence as a hindrance to instruction. He cited delays in training and difficulties in obtaining information and materials regarding the America's Choice program as the chief causes. During Interview 1 (September, 2001), Taylor stated, "We have just started actually teaching. We are just about at the end of the 9 weeks [grading period]. And we have been doing [the America's Choice] program for two weeks because the rest of the time has been spent trying to figure out what [the school improvement team] wanted." During Interview 2 (November, 2001), the principal indicated that he had purchased additional materials mandated by America's Choice, "but we haven't had any training in how to use them." The principal also expressed frustration that the school improvement team leader interrupted instruction for the purpose of collecting student survey data.

Regarding teaching materials, the principal complained, "We just got the material last week that we were supposed to have in July." When the teaching materials arrived, they were often incomplete, according to Taylor. Regarding America's Choice teaching manuals, Taylor said, "They gave us half of what we needed [in teacher's manuals] and no student books at all." He stated that the lack of supplies and materials had a snowballing effect in that it hindered the teachers' ability to teach, which in turn, affected instruction and ultimately student achievement.

Taylor feared achievement also would be affected by inconsistent implementation of two different reading curricula: the Success For All and America's Choice programs, two approaches not designed to work compatibly. He stated, "Some [teachers] are putting more emphasis on Success For All while some are putting more emphasis on America's Choice and they are neglecting the other program to a degree." Taylor felt the lack of a consistent and sufficiently tooled curriculum led to inconsistencies in teaching, saying, "They [the teachers] don't know where to go. So they are losing direction." He viewed this situation as ultimately detrimental to student achievement because teachers were forced, "to do too many things to make [the school improvement team] happy instead of looking at what the kids need."

During Interview 3, Taylor summarized his concerns:

> We don't have any test data to show, of course, because we've just started this [working with the school improvement team], but the feeling from the teachers is that they are not being able to do what they feel they need to do. So we're expecting to have a slide downward in scores on student achievement tests. (Interview 3, 406-410)

Emotional Effect on the School's Perspective of Itself

Throughout the first year of recovery, the principal reported a concern that the school's improved image was being adversely affected by the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. During Interview 1 (September, 2001), he described the news of the school improvement team's intervention as affecting the teachers' self-image, stating, "My teachers were somewhat upset. They took it personally." He reported the intervention caused a decline in staff morale, self-image, and a disappointment that the staff's previous two years' worth of efforts to improve the school were all for naught. Regarding the staff, the principal stated the school improvement team "has been another factor pulling against them, hurting their self-image."

Taylor attributed the decline in morale and self-image of the school, its staff, and himself to a) a condescending attitude on the part of the school improvement team leader, b) the lack "of support" from the central office, and, c) the lack of guidance and information pertaining to the America's Choice program, and most importantly, d) the lack of staff and principal input in the decision to implement the program in the first place.

At the end of the first year of recovery, the principal feared an exodus of good teachers due to a lack of faith in them from the Board of Education evidenced by the intervention of the school improvement team. Taylor stated during Interview 3 (February, 2002), "I've had several teachers tell me that they would look for other places to go." The principal also questioned his own future at the school, reporting during

Interview 1 (September, 2001), "I have been thinking very seriously this year of taking on a different job."

A Tentative View Toward the School's Future

The February Shift, which marked improved communication between the principal and the central office, seemed to provide a glimmer of light in the principal's view toward the future of Peck Elementary School. The principal stated during Interview 3 (February, 2002) that there was a chance that the Board of Education might discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and America's Choice program. Taylor noted the effect of the possibility on his view of the school's future:

> It gives me kind of an excited feeling…a purposeful feeling that if I'm going to have the support of the board and I'm going to have the support of the superintendent, I have the energy to get out there and look for innovative ways of reaching students and having them progress. (Interview 3, 365-369)

Taylor said the improvement in communication since the February Shift also affected the staff's view toward the future of the school as well. Taylor said the possibility of discontinuing the school improvement team and America's Choice program "has sparked the whole faculty back to much more work. They are working harder now than they have all year, and I think a lot of that is that they have hope that we'll get out of this without having to continue the program next year."

Despite the emergence of hope that appeared between the principal and staff after the February Shift, Taylor remained concerned about Peck Elementary School's future. The principal indicated a hesitance to assume that the school would emerge from its first year of recovery as unscathed by what he identified as an extremely disconcerting experience. When asked to summarize the future of Peck Elementary School, Principal

Donald Taylor said, "It's too early to tell. I've worked with a lot of individuals trying to get the message out to them that [discontinuing the school improvement team and America's Choice] is what we need to do…It all depends on what the board comes up within the next week or two."

By Interview 4 (March 2002), the superintendent announced the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program. The principal noted a marked improvement in the morale of both the staff and himself. Still, he indicated a fear that the first year of the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program had "damaged" the school:

> Instead of growing with another year of expertise in curriculum and in what our kids need, I was spinning my wheels the whole year. Frustrating. We have shown that we can do what we need to do and we don't need somebody looking over our shoulders. The whole process to me was a useless waste of time and effort. I resent it very deeply. I think it took a year out of my students' educational lives. I think it took a year out of my teachers' growth. And it has been a stunting experience for me. Just a total waste of time. (Interview 4, 201-209)

As for the future of Peck Elementary School, Taylor indicated that a great deal of work would be needed to rebuild what he felt was damaged during the implementation of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program:

> We're recuperating. That's the way I would put it. We know we're not continuing the programs, so we're looking at what we can gain from the programs that we would like to keep. But we're going to need a period of healing because we've been damaged by the process. I would say our kids have not had a lot of instruction that they have needed this year. I think we've been hurt. We're down. And we need to get it back. I think there's another way to go. And I think we'll have to build it from within. (Interview 4, 212-218)

Section Summary

The fourth question sought to uncover the perspectives of Donald Taylor, principal of Peck Elementary School, on the state of the school at the conclusion of the first year of the recovery process, which included the intervention of the external, state school improvement team and its administration of the America's Choice program as the vehicle of recovery. At the end of the first year of recovery, the principal viewed the school as experiencing a state of upheaval. The state of upheaval noted in the present study is consistent with findings of Steyn and Squelch (1994), who studied principals during reform and reported, "system, parents, governing bodies, teachers, principals, and even pupils [had] been confronted with challenges and unforeseen problems for which they were ill prepared" (p. 189).

Throughout data collection, Taylor expressed concerns on three levels:

1. He feared a negative impact on student achievement tests.
2. He described the intervention as having an emotional impact on the school's perception of itself, as expressed by the staff.
3. He viewed the future of the school as tentative, due the perspective that damage had occurred as the result of the school improvement team intervention and the America's Choice program. He viewed the damage to encompass teacher morale and growth, as well as student achievement.

Regarding student achievement, Taylor feared the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program would reflect a negative impact on standardized test scores for several reasons. Taylor viewed the school improvement team as hindering instruction due to delays in training and difficulties in obtaining information

and materials for the America's Choice program. The principal reported that materials necessary to teach the program were either late in arriving or incomplete, which hindered teachers' abilities to provide adequate instruction using the America's Choice program's parameters. He also expressed concern that the school improvement team leader attempted to interrupt student instruction for the purpose of collecting student survey data. Further, the principal feared achievement would be affected by inconsistent implementation of two different reading curricula: the Success For All and America's Choice programs, two approaches not designed to work compatibly. When viewed within the context of previous studies on the challenges faced by principals during other restructuring efforts, this finding was unique to the present study.

The principal indicated the intervention of the school improvement team had a negative impact on the school's perception of itself, as expressed by the staff. He reported the intervention caused a decline in staff morale, self-image, and a disappointment that the staff's previous two years' worth of efforts to improve the school were all for naught. This finding supports Koury's (2000) identification of school climate as being a key issue faced by principals during a restructuring effort in San Francisco. However, when viewed within the context of previous studies concerning major *challenges* reported by principals during other restructuring efforts, this finding was unique to the present study.

Taylor attributed the decline in morale and self-image of the school, its staff, and himself to a) a condescending attitude on the part of the school improvement team leader, b) the lack of support from the central office, c) the lack of guidance and information

pertaining to the America's Choice program, and most importantly, and, d) the lack of staff and principal input in the decision to implement the program in the first place.

When viewed within the context of previous studies on the challenges faced by principals during other restructuring efforts, two of these findings support assertions made by Dimmock (1999). The report of difficulties with the school improvement team leader in the present study was similar to the power struggle suggested by Dimmock; however, Dimmock reported a power struggle with school system management as opposed to a power struggle involving a school improvement team leader. In contrast, the lack of support from the central office reported in the present study differs from the findings of Dimmock, which found the inverse to be true in another recovery setting. Dimmock observed over-involvement, rather than a lack of involvement, on the part of system managers.

With regard to the school's future, Taylor expressed hope due to the fact that the school improvement team and America's Choice program were abandoned after the first year of recovery. Taylor attributed the decision to abandon to his improved communication with the superintendent and the Board of Education regarding his and the staff's negative perspective of the intervention. Still, the principal characterized his view of Peck Elementary School's future as tentative, due to what he identified as "damage" during the implementation of the school improvement team and America's Choice program. He summarized, "It's too early to tell." When viewed within the context of previous studies on the challenges faced by principals during other restructuring efforts, this finding was unique to the present study.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of one elementary principal whose school (grades 3-5) was rated by the State of Georgia as being low-performing and whose superintendent elected to have an external, stated appointed school improvement team assist in the recovery of the low-performing school. The duration of the study spanned one school year.

Using a qualitative case study approach, the researcher hoped to uncover the challenges that a principal faced during the first year of the recovery process in an elementary school (grades 3-5) in central Georgia.

The overall research questions that guided this study included:

1. What did the principal identify as chief challenges and barriers during the recovery process?
2. How did the principal perceive the intervention of the external, state school improvement team?
3. What effects did the recovery process have on the principal over the first year of recovery?
4. How did the principal perceive the state of the school at the end of the first year of recovery?

To address these questions, the researcher collected data using a qualitative case study approach and the constant comparative method of data analysis. Multiple data sources included two full-day observations of the principal, four semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, and relevant artifacts.

Challenges and Barriers Associated with Implementing a Recovery Strategy

The principal encountered a number of challenges and barriers during the first year of the recovery process. The chief challenges and barriers reported by the principal during data collection were:

1. Challenges and barriers in communication,
2. Conflict,
3. Maintaining staff morale; and,
4. Time management.

Challenges and barriers in communication were reported as issues that faced the principal on a daily basis. Communication issues arose with regard to the principal's relationship with the superintendent and the Board of Education, the school improvement team, its team leader, and the state level representative of the school improvement team. The identification of this barrier was consistent with the findings of Steyn and Squelch (1994), who noted a strong potential for problems in communication during restructuring efforts.

The second major challenge for the principal lay in dealing with situations of conflict with the school improvement team leader and with the state level representative. Dimmock (1999) reported a similar challenge for the principal during another reform effort, noting a power struggle in which the principal found himself at odds with management of the school system. In the present study, conflict was defined as encompassing situations in which communication between parties degenerated to a point at which arguments or disagreements made further discussion counterproductive to the recovery process.

The third major challenge that faced the principal was the maintenance of staff morale during the recovery process. The principal tied the emergence of morale issues to the lack of staff input on the decision to implement the state school improvement team. He reported the primary elements of low morale as including teacher suspicion, frustration in their dealings with the school improvement team leader, and a state of demoralization accompanying the feeling that they were being punished despite demonstrated progress on student achievement tests during the two years prior to the intervention. The eventual effects of the decline in morale led several teachers to vocalize their consideration of employment elsewhere during the following school year. This finding supports the assertion of Peterson and Solstrud (1996), who noted a strong possibility of employee alienation during times of transition.

Finally, the principal reported time management demands as a major challenge during the first year of recovery. The intervention of the school improvement team called for added documentation and paperwork, additional training, and a host of class scheduling changes. This challenge was consistent with the findings of Koury (2000), which identified barriers in time management for principals during reconstitution in San Francisco. In addition, the principal in the present study reported a lack of sufficient time for teachers to adequately cover other subject material due to the America's Choice program's demand for extended time to be devoted to the teaching of reading.

Additional challenges emerged during the data collection process, including the necessity of dealing with a reportedly outdated and inadequate facility, which hindered implementation of the program, as well as negative community perceptions of the school, which reportedly resulted in the withdrawal of approximately twenty students.

The Principal's View of the Intervention Itself

Throughout data collection, the principal expressed the view that the intervention of the school improvement team was an affront to both his staff and himself, due to demonstrated progress on student achievement tests during the two years prior to the intervention. Taylor also viewed the nature of the intervention as intrusive and as interfering with the Peck staff's attempts to better student achievement. Both the affront and intrusion were exacerbated by difficulties in communication and cooperation between the principal and the team leader, supporting a similar finding by Dimmock (1999).

In addition, the principal reported that the intervention lacked a key element necessary for success: confidence in the intervention itself. He emphasized that confidence in the intervention was lacking on the parts of his staff and himself due to 1) the lack of buy-in by the school staff prior to implementation; 2) a lack of information and sufficient training in the America's Choice Program, the vehicle of recovery; 3) the lack of financial support to fund required elements of the program; and 4) the lack of clearly defined roles for the key managers during the intervention. Consistent with this final point, Dimmock (1999) also found difficulties in clarity regarding which decisions were to be left to site-based management versus which were to be dictated by the school system in his study of a principal during school reform in Australia.

Effects of the Recovery Process on the Principal

The recovery process had a range of effects on the principal. The effects, often emotional, were characterized across three key areas. First, the principal questioned his role during the process of implementing the school improvement team and the America's

Choice program. As data collection progressed, disagreements over power with the school improvement team leader led to conflict and ultimately hostility between the two. This finding supports that of Dimmock (1999), who noted a similar power struggle between the principal and system management in a study in Australia. The principal in the current study also expressed a great deal of frustration in his attempts to access information, training, and the implementation procedures of the America's Choice program.

Second, the principal perceived a lack of confidence in his leadership abilities, due to the decision at the central office level to adopt the intervention of the school improvement team despite the school's demonstrated progress on student achievement test scores during the first two years of his administration. He noted that the presence of the school improvement team eroded the hard fought morale of his teachers. The principal expressed disappointment in his diminished role as instructional leader. He also faced a moral dilemma surrounding the need to hold staff members accountable for the implementation of a curriculum in which he himself lacked confidence.

Finally, the principal questioned his future as the leader of Peck Elementary School. As data collection progressed, the principal exhibited a variety of different emotions, ranging from enthusiasm to anger to a sense of depression characterized by a flat affect. Fieldnotes documented physical facial expressions including worry, anxiety, anger, and a sense of loss. At other times, such as during the February Shift, when communication with the superintendent and Board of Education had improved and Taylor felt that he had a receptive audience to hear his concerns about the school improvement team and America's Choice program, the principal exhibited a visible

heartening of spirit. Though he felt vindicated by the decision of the Board of Education to discontinue the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program, Taylor acknowledged that the process, "was a stunting experience" for both himself and the school.

The Principal's Perspectives on the State of the School at the Conclusion of the First Year of Recovery

The fourth question sought to uncover the perspectives of Donald Taylor, principal of Peck Elementary School, on the state of the school at the conclusion of the first year of the recovery process, which included the intervention of the external, state school improvement team and its administration of the America's Choice program as the vehicle of recovery. At the end of the first year of recovery, the principal viewed the school as experiencing a state of upheaval. Taylor feared a negative impact on student achievement tests. In addition, Taylor described the intervention as having an emotional impact on the school's perception of itself, as expressed by the staff, and, he viewed the future of the school as tentative, due to his perception that the school had been "damaged" by the intervention of the school improvement team and the America's Choice program."

With regard to the school's future, Taylor expressed hope due to the decision to abandon the school improvement team and America's Choice program. Still, the principal characterized his view of Peck Elementary School's future as tentative, due to "damage" caused by the intervention process. He summarized, "It's too early to tell." When viewed within the context of previous studies on the challenges faced by principals during other restructuring efforts, this finding was unique to the present study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of one elementary principal whose school (grades 3-5) was rated by the State of Georgia as being unsatisfactory and whose superintendent elected to have an external, stated appointed school improvement team assist in the recovery of this low-performing school. The duration of the study spanned one school year. This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What did the principal identify as chief challenges and barriers during the recovery process?
2. How did the principal perceive the intervention of the external, state school improvement team?
3. What effects did the recovery process have on the principal over the first year of recovery?
4. How did the principal perceive the state of the school at the end of the first year of recovery?

A qualitative case study research design was used to examine the perspectives of one elementary principal whose superintendent elected to have an external, state appointed school improvement team assist in the recovery of a low-performing school. Data collection, using two full-day observations, four semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, and relevant artifacts, began in September of 2001 and concluded in March of

2002. Constant comparative data analysis was used in the development of codes designed to identify themes leading to theoretical discussion.

Four levels of findings were reported and discussed in Chapter IV. These four levels included individual findings and emergent themes. Data demonstrated the emergence of 14 themes divided across four categories. Four themes emerged as challenges and barriers. Three themes addressed the principal's perspective of the school improvement team and its intervention. Three themes addressed the effects the recovery process had on the principal. And four themes emerged regarding the principal's perspective of the school at the conclusion of the first year of recovery. Discussion and implications pertaining to further research and practical applications were based on these findings.

This chapter presents a summary of the study. Following is a discussion and a presentation of implications for further research and practical applications based on the results of the study, followed by a final commentary.

Summary of Findings

Challenges and barriers reported by the principal included difficulties in communication, conflict with the school improvement team, its leader, and the state level representative, the maintenance of staff morale, and time management demands. Communication issues arose with regard to the principal's relationship with the superintendent and the Board of Education, the school improvement team, its team leader, and the state level representative of the school improvement team.The principal viewed the school improvement team as an intrusion, and he reported the perspective that the school improvement team was an affront to him, his staff, and the students by the

Board of Education, Central Office, and Superintendent. He also reported a lack of confidence in the America's Choice program, the vehicle by which the school improvement team attempted to recover the school.

The effects the recovery process had on the principal included his questioning his role in the process, a lack of confidence in both himself and the school system, and his questioning his own future at the school. He noted that the presence of the school improvement team eroded the morale of his teachers and diminished his role as instructional leader. He also faced a moral dilemma surrounding the need to hold staff members accountable for the implementation of a curriculum in which he himself lacked confidence.

The principal's perspective of the state of the school after the first year of this intervention included a fear of weaker student scores on achievement tests as well as the view that the recovery process had a negative emotional impact upon the school's self-image, as expressed by the staff. The principal further viewed the state of the school as tentative, due to the decision of the Board of Education to abandon the intervention of the state school improvement team and America's Choice program during the following school year.

Discussion

Fourteen themes were identified across four levels of findings, and each were discussed in Chapter IV with regard to the challenges and barriers faced by the principal, the principal's view of the school improvement team, the effects of the recovery process on the principal, and the principal's view of the state of the school at the end of the first year of recovery. The purpose of this section is to discuss major findings within the

context of extant literature. This section will also address the concept of recovery. Each area to follow will include assertions, supported by data and theoretical discussion, and will be followed by an analysis of findings linked to the current literature.

Perspectives of Challenges and Barriers

Kaplan and Evans (1997), among others, emphasized the importance of effective and open communication to the success of school improvement efforts. The challenges and barriers regarding effective communication reported by the principal in this study support the findings of Steyn and Squelch (1994) and Spilman (1995), both of whom identified communication to be a major challenge for principals attempting mandated school reform. In this study, difficulties in communication involved all major players in recovery: the principal, the staff, the school improvement team, its leader, and the superintendent and Board of Education. As a result, the lack of communication pertaining to key aspects the recovery vehicle (the America's Choice program) interfered with the promotion of consensus building, staff morale, and trust among the principal and teachers charged with the program's implementation. The resulting instability undermined the possibility for a cultural transformation in school recovery for the school, which was reported by Blankstein (1993); Dreyfuss, Cistone, and Divita (2992); and Weller and Weller (2000) as being vital to successful change in schools.

Conflict was encountered by the principal and staff due to communication difficulties with the school improvement team leader, and was similar to the findings of Dimmock (1999), who noted the development of a power struggle between the principal and system managers in his study of a principal during reform efforts. The power struggle that developed between the principal and school improvement team leader was

largely caused by the lack of clearly defined roles for each of them. The principal consistently reported the view that the team leader was a threat to his power base. This supports Rozmus' (1998) position that a lack of clarity regarding the locus of authority during reform efforts affects the reform's effectiveness.

It is possible that the emergence of a state of conflict may have been inevitable, given the lack of participant inclusion in the decision-making progress regarding the superintendent's mandate for school improvement team intervention. Also, conflict resulted from lack of communication and a lack of buy-in by participants. Conflict between the principal and the school improvement team leader was exacerbated by the principal's lack of confidence in the team leader, who served as the bridge between the school's perceived low-performing status and recovery via America's Choice. One must also consider the possibility that the principal in this study became predisposed to automatically vetoing ideas presented by the team leader because of conflict between them.

The challenge of time demands on the principal and staff during recovery illustrated another key issue. The prominent increase in time demands and additional tasks upon the principal supports the findings of Steyn and Squelch (1994) and Koury (2000), who introduced time demands and increased workloads as key challenges faced by principals during other recovery efforts.

Perspective of the Intervention Itself

When questioned in February regarding his level of knowledge about the America's Choice program—the vehicle of recovery—the principal responded, "Don't have a clue." The principal and staff's lack of knowledge and training about the

America's Choice program affected their ability to implement it. Throughout this study, the principal reported his view of the intervention of the school improvement team as an affront to both the staff and himself, and as an intrusion into the school setting.

It is important to outline the context in which the school in this study was taken over, because the context differs from other low-performing and failing schools reported by Ziebarth (2001) in that the school being taken over in this case already had demonstrated sustained academic progress prior to the takeover. During each of the two years prior to the decision to implement the school improvement team, Peck Elementary School showed steady gains of between 3-10 per cent in each area of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). Peck was the only school in Busbee County to do so. The need for mandated school reform was never perceived by the principal and staff in light of the demonstrated progress in student achievement and likely inhibited principal and staff acceptance of the school improvement team's intervention.

The principal reported a lack of confidence in the intervention itself due to 1) the lack of buy-in by the school staff prior to implementation; 2) a lack of information and sufficient training in the America's Choice Program, the vehicle of the intervention; 3) the lack of financial support to fund required elements of the program; and 4) the lack of clearly defined roles for the key players during the intervention. These findings support those of Dimmock (1999), who identified similar difficulties in clarity regarding which decisions were to be left to site-based management versus which were to be dictated by the school system in a case study of a principal during mandated school reform in Australia.

The setting and circumstances surrounding the decision to implement the school improvement team intervention and the America's Choice program at Peck Elementary School in spite of its demonstrated progress may have undermined the recovery effort from the outset. The lack of principal and staff consensus on a real need for external intervention inhibited change. This finding is consistent with the work of Peterson and Solstrud (1996) who warned of the possibility of teacher alienation during times of transition and encouraged careful attention to the maintenance of staff empowerment.

In contrast with Peterson and Solstrud's assertion, the principal in this case described the manner and tone in which the school improvement team began the intervention as hostile, condescending, overbearing, and unprofessional, which led to suspicion and perhaps diluted the intent of the intervention—school improvement. The principal reported that the school improvement team and its leader ignored the concepts of buy-in, inclusion, and empowerment. The findings in this area of conflict aligned with the view of Hultgren and Redlinger (1996), who summarized, "change occurs when individuals understand and embrace the need for something different than what has existed" (p. 18). The principal and staff never saw the need for the school improvement team's intervention. The principal and staff believed they were not granted sufficient training, funding, and materials pertaining to the vehicle of recovery (America's Choice). And the principal and staff never felt included in decisions because the intervention was mandated, and its tone was unfriendly.

Effects of Recovery on the Principal

The recovery process showed a range of effects on the principal, including his questioning his role during the process, a lack of confidence in his own abilities as a leader due to the decision to implement the school improvement team, and led to his questioning of his future as the school's principal.

Prior to the implementation of the school improvement team, the principal's views toward his job were consistent with the findings of Calabrese, Zepeda, and Fine (1998), who viewed the principalship as encompassing the roles of "instructional leader, team facilitator, and consensus builder" (p. 85). The principal reported the superintendent never made his role during the recovery process clear. This lack of role clarity, when combined with the mandated introduction of the school improvement team leader into the school setting, caused the principal to question his value as an administrator. During an interview, the principal said, "If you're going to have a school improvement team like America's Choice, you might as well just be a manager of facilities."

In addition to the lack of role clarity, the findings of this study reflected deep personal effects on the principal. Koury (2000) identified a key obstacle affecting principals during school reform as taking a "personal toll on their heath and energy" (p. 141). Koury's assertion was supported by the findings of this study, in which the principal exhibited a variety of different emotions, ranging from enthusiasm to anger to a sense of depression characterized by a flat affect. In addition, fieldnotes documented physical facial expressions including worry, anxiety, anger, and a sense of loss. At one point he stated, "It makes me wonder why I would want to be a school principal."

This view led the principal to question what role, if any, he was to play in the future of Peck Elementary School beyond the current school year. Given the assertion by Gallegos (2000) and Carlin (1992) that principals whose schools' performance is lagging usually are replaced, the principal in this study may have had good cause to question his future, despite his school's previous progress in student achievement. At any rate, the principal responded by exploring the possibility of employment elsewhere. After the February Shift, his view toward his future at the school brightened due to increased communication with the superintendent, central office, and school board regarding the difficulties he was experiencing in working with the school improvement team, its leader, and the America's Choice program.

When the superintendent announced the decision by the Board of Education to abandon the school improvement team and the America's Choice program, the principal felt vindicated and relieved, but also expressed a great deal of frustration and resentment because he felt grave damage resulted from the intervention. He summarized his perspective on the effect of the experience on himself and his school as follows:

> Professionally, I'd say that it was a stunting experience. Instead of growing with another year of expertise in curriculum and in what our kids need, I was spinning my wheels the whole year. Frustrated. I knew everybody was going to be much more excited when everything was removed. I feel vindicated. We have shown that we can do what we need to do and we don't need somebody looking over our shoulders. The whole process to me was a useless waste of time and effort. I resent it very deeply. I think it took a year out of my students' educational lives. I think it took a year out of my teachers' growth. And it has been a stunting experience for me. Just a total waste of time. (Interview 4, 201-209)

Perspective of the State of School at End of the First Year of Recovery

As the first year of recovery drew to a close, the principal reported a fear of the school improvement team's intervention having a negative impact on school achievement

tests. The principal attributed this fear to a state of staff confusion and a loss in quality teaching resulting from the implementation of the America's Choice program due to insufficient teacher and administrator training, insufficient materials, and a lack of funding. He further described an emotional impact on the staff's self-image, stating, "They are completely demoralized." Finally, he viewed the future of the school as tentative, due the decision by the Board of Education to abandon the school improvement team and the America's Choice program at the end of the school year. At the end of the first year of recovery, the principal viewed the school as "damaged" by the intervention. He elaborated, "I think it took a year out of my students' educational lives. I think it took a year out of my teachers' growth. And it has been a stunting experience for me. Just a total waste of time."

The finding that the principal feared a negative impact on student achievement test scores was unique to this study. Though Ziebarth's (2001) exhaustive review of school reform efforts made no mention of any adverse effects on student achievement due to reform efforts, it is not beyond of the realm of possibility, as this is an area in which there is little extant research. The issues of staff confusion and a drop in morale resulting from the lack of teacher and administrator empowerment during the implementation of the America's Choice program are consistent with the findings of Peterson and Solstrud (1996), who warned of the possibility of teacher alienation during times of transition.

Implications

The implications of this study on principals participating in recovery efforts through the use of external, state school improvement teams include suggestions for

further research. In addition, a discussion of implications for hiring committees and low-performing schools are presented, as well.

This study might benefit those encountering similar situations of recovery. The present study might also benefit interview committees in selecting personnel to become principals of low-performing and failing schools. The identification of specific issues and challenges that a new principal might encounter during recovery could assist interview committees in the selection of principals whom they feel would best handle those issues and challenges.

Implications for Further Research

By design, this study was limited to a sole subject, as a case study by nature is a study of one. As outlined in Chapter III, in a study of one such as this, generalizability is limited to that of the reader. Further research might examine two or more principals attempting recovery by means of external, state school improvement teams to provide a better view of similarities and contrasts among multiple settings. Such a study would be enhanced further by the inclusion of more than one school improvement team and team leader for the purpose of eliminating the "same team" variable that was unavoidable in this case. This would enable researchers to contrast differences in approaches between separate school improvement teams and team leaders.

The concept of recovery, discussed in greater detail to follow, also merits further research. One might study two instances of takeovers of low-performing or failing schools, with the variable being the philosophy behind the takeover, such as recovery versus reconstitution, for the purpose of identifying similarities and differences between approaches as well as the results of each.

This study, though focused solely on principal perspectives, also enabled the researcher to suggest further research in the area of school improvement teams and the properties that make them effective. Further studies of school improvement teams might contrast different vehicles of recovery, such as America's Choice versus Success For All, as administered by school improvement teams. Though this study made no attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of either school improvement teams or the America's Choice program, further research into either might assist school districts in choosing the means of recovery most appropriate for individual situations.

Additional challenges emerged in this study on more limited bases. Further research might examine the issue of school facilities and the facilities' role during recovery efforts. For example, one might compare and contrast identical modes of recovery across a variety of facilities to gain greater knowledge as to its influence. Student withdrawal was another issue that emerged. Additional research in this area might examine withdrawal rates during different forms of recovery efforts.

Implications for Principals

The findings of this study suggest key implications for research into principals' roles during recovery efforts. Principals during recovery efforts might pay careful attention to effective communication and involvement regarding all parties involved in the decision-making and implementation processes, conflict management, time demands, sufficient training in the chosen recovery model, and staff morale. Further research might examine the differences in leadership styles that individual principals bring to recovery situations and compare and contrast their experiences and the results of the recovery processes.

The unique context of this study (two years of demonstrated student achievement prior to the intervention) played a significant role on data collection pertaining to the role of the principal. The context added morale and self-image issues in addition to a, "Why me?" mentality on the part of the principal that might not be evident during the recovery of a school that had shown no progress and no improvement in self-image over two years prior to the intervention.

The Present Setting

It is not particularly common during major recovery efforts, especially reconstitution, for an existing principal to remain in place at the beginning of school reform efforts (Carlin, 1992; Gallegos, 2000). The possibility of principal bias regarding his approach versus the school improvement team's approach in this situation must also be taken into consideration, as the subject admitted, "I guess it hurt my pride that my school [was] being classified in this way."

Further, the data collected in this study demonstrated that the principal maintained a negative view toward the school improvement team throughout its intervention. Regarding the team leader, it is likely that this negative view was mutual. It is possible that the principal's negative view toward the school improvement team, the America's Choice program, and his power struggle with its leader may have helped undermine, to a degree, the ability of the intervention to be successful. Additional research might compare the experiences of different principals who undertake recovery during their own first years at separate school sites. This would help eliminate any principal bias that might occur across pre-recovery versus recovery settings.

Both the principal's statements about his positive philosophy and the demonstrated progress during the first two years of his administration suggest the subject was an effective principal. Staff interview data would have yielded a more reliable description of the staff's view toward the principal's leadership, the school improvement team, its leader, and the America's Choice program. Due to the lack of staff interview data, the researcher was forced to rely on the principal's reports of staff sentiment rather than the words of the staff themselves. Further research might examine staff interview data in addition to that obtained directly from the principal to account for this variable.

Implications for Interview Committees

The findings of this study suggest key implications for committees charged with interviewing principals for positions as leaders of low-performing schools experiencing recovery. When screening potential candidates for principal positions in schools being recovered, hiring committees might consider seeking candidates possessing the following traits:

1) effective communication abilities during times of upheaval;
2) a willingness to accept outside intervention and share at least partial power with outside recovery agents (if merited by a chosen recovery vehicle);
3) a strong ability to motivate staff despite adversity; and,
4) effective time management.

Implications for System Leaders Contemplating Recovery Efforts in Other Low-Performing Schools

The findings of this study suggested the importance of 1) effective communication among key change agents, 2) conflict prevention, 3) attention to the

maintenance of staff morale during change, and 4) effective time management as vital to the success of recovery efforts. Careful preparation and attention to these issues might prevent these elements' ability to inhibit success in other recovery efforts.

An additional concern regarding recovery efforts is for system level leaders who are considering external means of recovery interventions to carefully consider the context and history of the school in which recovery is being proposed. Within Peck Elementary School, there existed a very important extenuating circumstance: the school had demonstrated consistent improvement as measured by student achievement tests in the two years prior to the decision to implement the school improvement team. In addition, it was the only school in its system to demonstrate gains across every level of achievement measured by the standardized test. Therefore, perhaps it is not surprising that the principal and staff who oversaw such progress might resent a mandate for external intervention.

A logical and persuasive argument can be made that schools demonstrating consistent improvement over time due to localized and concerted principal and staff efforts should be allowed to continue to demonstrate that success before the implementation of an external school improvement team. In this case, the school improvement team actually may have triggered an adverse effect within the school. Staff and principal morale plummeted. Faith in the staff's sustained and demonstrated work toward improving student achievement waned. And the principal reported a fear that the demonstrated academic progress, ironically, might be reversed due to the attempt by the school system to further improve student achievement by mandated external means. System level authorities might consider close monitoring of low-performing schools

which have demonstrated progress, as in the current study, to insure that progress continues before calling for external intervention.

An additional implication for system leaders concerns system level involvement during recovery efforts. In this study, the school system initiated the intervention of an external, state school improvement team, then allowed the recovery effort to progress by itself with little monitoring or communication from the central office for much of the first year. As communication problems at the site flourished, morale declined, power struggles developed, and training, materials, and financial concerns abounded, the principal reported very little interaction in the process on the part of the central office. It is quite possible that many of these concerns on the part of the principal could have been alleviated or remedied by the central office had there been a representative visiting the school periodically to monitor the recovery process for potential difficulties. While Dimmock (1999) reported the danger of micro-management on the system level, it appeared that this case typified the opposite. Perhaps local system level leaders might consider close monitoring of recovery efforts so that they can provide additional support or intervention as needed, while avoiding Dimmock's reported trap of micro-management.

Noteworthy was the change in communication between the principal and system leaders regarding the recovery effort following the February system-wide retreat, during which the principal found the opportunity to voice his misgivings with regard to the recovery intervention to the superintendent and Board of Education. After the February retreat, the principal reported additional cooperation and input from the superintendent, central office, and board of education. The principal welcomed the increased awareness

of the recovery process on the part of system level leaders, and reported improvement in communication, morale, support, and hope that his and the staff's concerns regarding difficulties during the recovery process might be addressed at last.

Fullan (1992) attributed the past failures of many types of reform, including restructuring, to over-regulation by school systems' central management as well as a failure to involve site-level personnel (e.g., teachers and principals), the true practitioners and implementers of any school reform effort, in its creation, implementation, and evaluation. While the findings of this study did not document over-regulation by the central office, the findings support Fullan's remaining assertion, in that the challenges and barriers faced during the recovery process failed to involve site-level personnel (e.g., himself and the staff) in its creation, implementation, and evaluation.

Recovery

This study introduced the concept of recovery as an alternative theoretical framework for approaching takeovers and restructuring efforts in low-performing and failing schools. The recovery concept is rooted in the literature of fields such as mental health, emergency management, addiction research, medicine, law, and environmental philosophy. Though a common definition is elusive, recovery as outlined in definitions from substance abuse, medical, and addictive literature, brings to one's mind the idea of a healing, a return to a state of health and well-being, and carries with it a seriousness: a sense of gravity.

Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (1996) defined recovery as:

> 1. The act or power of regaining, retaking, or conquering again; a recovering or reclaiming. 2. a getting well again, coming or bringing back to consciousness, revival of a person from weakness,

> etc. 3. a regaining of balance, of former position or condition, etc.; a return to soundness. 4. the time needed for recovering. (p. 987)

A report issued by the Office of the United States Surgeon General (Department of Health and Human Services, 1999) stated, "recovery is variously called a process, an outlook, a vision, [and] a guiding principal," then added, "the overarching message is that hope and restoration of a meaningful life are possible, despite serious illness" (p. 97).

No matter how one chooses to define it specifically, recovery connotes healing and a return to a state of health and well-being. Recovery is human-centered. This study posed the notion that the resolution of issues pertaining to low-performing and failing schools for the purpose of educating children must be viewed in the same way.

Why view the takeovers of low-performing and failing schools in terms of recovery rather than the current term, restructuring? The reform of low-performing and failing schools is an issue at the forefront of current public debate in American education. Low-performing and failing schools should be handled delicately and with great care, due to the number of schools which will be undergoing reform in coming years during new and sweeping state and national mandates.

The concept of recovery lies in direct contrast to the cold, mechanical, and industrial connotation of the term restructuring. Recovery is used more often qualitatively than it is used quantitatively. The rationale for a movement toward the philosophy of recovery over restructuring during the reform of low-performing and failing schools perhaps is exemplified best by the view of philosopher Carl Jung, who stated, "We cannot live in the afternoon of life according to the program of life's morning; for what was great in the morning will be little at evening" (Jung Institute of Boston, 2001).

Recovery in the Present Case Study

The analysis of recovery as it applies to this study must begin with a discussion of three key questions:

1. Was the school in the present case recovered?
2. Would one characterize the delivery of the school improvement team intervention in the current case as recovery, given the premise that recovery constitutes a healing and a return to a state of health and well-being?
3. What are implications for the theory of recovery, given the data collected in the current case?

When examining whether recovery took place in the present study, data suggests that it did not. Actually, the inverse can be argued, due to the decision by the Board of Education to abandon the school improvement team and America's Choice program outright at the completion of the first year. The emergence of barriers in communication between the key players—in this case the principal, the school improvement team leader (the agent of recovery), and the superintendent and Board of Education—actually indicated the opposite of healing and a return to a state of health and well-being. The absence of both a common philosophy of purpose and a clear definition of leadership roles created a state of mistrust, power struggle, and conflict between the principal and the team leader instead of a sense of healing and a return to a state of health and well-being. Conflict and communication difficulties diminished the possibility for successful recovery in the present case.

Additional issues also inhibited the possibility of successful recovery in this case. The lack of participant input into the decision to adopt the school improvement team and America's Choice program led to the perspective among the principal and staff that they were being punished. This bred suspicion and a reluctance to assist in making the intervention successful, typified by the principal's statement, "We had it going fine and they came in and messed it all up."

Further, difficulties obtaining information, resources, training, support, and materials pertaining to the America's Choice program (the vehicle of recovery) inhibited the ability of the principal, staff, and (to an extent) the team leader to operate with full knowledge of the vehicle of recovery. This environment, in turn, inhibited the possibility for a successful recovery. Overall, the present case indicated little healing or a return to a state of health and well-being; however, the occurrence of the February Shift warrants additional discussion.

During an interview in February, the principal reported a dramatic improvement in communication between himself and the superintendent and Board of Education after a system-wide retreat for members of the Board of Education, the central office staff, and school principals. The retreat provided an opportunity for the principal to have an extensive and frank discussion with all present about the state school improvement team's intervention. Taylor reported, "They were very receptive to me telling them exactly what I thought about the situation with the different programs we do, especially America's Choice." The principal reported several follow-up phone calls and meetings with both the superintendent and members of the Board of Education following the retreat. For the purpose of this study, this event was identified as the February Shift.

The marked improvement in the principal's communication with both the superintendent and the board following the retreat indicated a pronounced shift in the role of the principal in the school improvement team's intervention. Communication-wise, Taylor reported the emergence of an active and productive dialogue as a very positive experience, which allowed him to appeal to system leaders to consider options other than the school improvement team as the primary means of recovering Peck Elementary School during the following year. The principal said:

> Before this, we felt that we were being pressed upon…that this program was put upon us against our will. Now, we have talked with the board…our board members…and our superintendent. And although we don't have a clear message from them that we are going to be free of this [the state school improvement team and the America's Choice and Success For All programs], we do feel like some of it, if not all of it, will be removed from us. And we feel pretty good about that. (Interview 3, 258-262)

After the February Shift, the principal reported improved morale and attitude in himself and the staff at Peck Elementary School. Consistent with the findings of Spilman (1995), the presence of effective communication was conducive to the creation of a positive atmosphere in which recovery might thrive. The principal viewed the chief barrier to true recovery as being the superintendent's decision to mandate the involvement of the school improvement team rather than attempt to sell the intervention to the principal and staff prior to implementation. Taylor said, "You have to have buy-in. That's the whole thing. And this program has had no buy-in."

Implications for Recovery

The principal's experiences exhibited within the data lie in complete contrast to recovery's ideal of encompassing healing and a return to a state of well-being. In this instance, "recovery" failed to resemble the theory upon which it is based.

Still, this study's importance in explaining the concept of recovery as it applies to the reform of low-performing and failing schools lies not in whether the current case illustrated successful recovery, but rather in the identification of the elements of recovery that were clearly missing. The premise lies in an assumption that much can be learned about recovery by a thorough examination of a situation in which it was absent.

An incident from the researcher's own experience as an assistant principal under an autocratic and demeaning principal helps illustrate this point. In his experience, the researcher learned a great deal about the traits of being a good leader by watching a poor leader in action. Similarly, the findings of the present study cast light on recovery: The data explained what steps hindered and inhibited recovery, conversely illuminating steps that might assist in recovery. In this way, the present study may illustrate what recovery is by showing first what it is *not*.

The present instance of recovery lacked clear communication, staff and principal buy-in, clearly defined roles for the principal and the agent of recovery (school improvement team leader), buy-in regarding the effectiveness of the recovery vehicle (the America's Choice program), and adequate training, financing, and materials for the operation of the intervention (America's Choice program). An analysis of the process of recovery in this case quite simply suggests what *not* to do when seeking recovery in other

settings. Using this rationale, the findings of this study lead to four key implications for the creation of an atmosphere conducive to successful recovery.

1. Consistent and clear communication between all players involved in recovery: principal, staff, recovery agent, the agent's supervisor (when applicable), superintendent, and the Board of Education;
2. Staff and principal input into the decision to adopt the intervention model to be used for recovery;
3. The establishment of clearly defined roles for the principal, intervention leader, and staff prior to the beginning of the recovery intervention model; and,
4. Adequate and sufficient training, financial support, and materials to operate the intervention model both before and during recovery.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of one elementary principal whose school (grades 3-5) was rated by the State of Georgia as being unsatisfactory and whose superintendent elected to have an external, stated appointed school improvement team assist in the recovery of this low-performing school. The duration of the study spanned one school year, 2001-2002.

A case study approach using the constant comparative method of data analysis was conducted for the purpose of examining the issues and challenges facing a principal during the first year of the recovery of a low-performing school in central Georgia. Multiple resources were used for data collection, including the transcripts of four semi-

structured interview sessions with the subject, two full days of observation, fieldnotes, and relevant artifacts.

Data revealed the principal's perspectives on myriad challenges during the first year of recovery. Challenges and barriers reported by the principal included difficulties in communication, conflict with the school improvement team, its leader, and the state level representative, maintaining staff morale, and time management demands. The principal viewed the school improvement team as an intrusion, and reported the perspective that the school improvement team was an affront to him, his staff, and students by the Board of Education, central office, and superintendent. He also reported a lack of confidence in the America's Choice program, the vehicle by which the school improvement team attempted to recover the school. The effects the recovery process had on the principal included his questioning his role in the process, a lack of confidence in both himself and the school system, and his questioning his own future at the school. The principal's perspective of the state of the school at the end of the first year of this intervention included a fear of weaker student scores on achievement tests as well as the view that the recovery process had a negative emotional impact upon the school's self-image, as expressed by the staff. The principal further viewed the state of the school as tentative, due to the decision of the Board of Education to abandon the intervention of the state school improvement team and America's Choice program at the end of the current school year.

The findings of this study suggest key implications for research into principals' roles during recovery efforts. Principals during recovery efforts might pay careful attention to effective communication and involvement regarding all parties involved in

the decision-making and implementation processes, clear role definitions for all involved leaders, conflict management, sufficient training in the chosen recovery model, and attention to staff morale. Further research might examine two or more principals attempting recovery by means of external, state school improvement teams in order to provide a better view of similarities and contrasts among multiple settings.

The findings of this study suggest key implications for committees charged with interviewing principals for positions as leaders of low-performing schools experiencing recovery. When screening potential candidates for principal positions in schools being recovered, hiring committees might consider seeking candidates possessing 1) effective communication abilities during times of upheaval, 2) a willingness to accept outside intervention and share at least partial power with outside recovery agents (if merited by a chosen recovery vehicle, 3) a strong ability to motivate staff despite adversity; and, 4) effective time management skills.

Implications for system leaders contemplating recovery efforts in low-performing schools suggested the importance of 1) effective communication among key change agents, 2) conflict prevention, 3) attention to the maintenance of staff morale during change, and 4) effective time management as vital to the success of recovery efforts. Careful preparation and attention to these issues might prevent their ability to inhibit success in other recovery efforts.

This study suggested further that efforts to reform low-performing and failing schools should be viewed using the philosophy of *recovery*, because recovery connotes a healing and a return to a state of well-being. The researcher argued that the philosophy of recovery provides the best lens through which to view efforts to improve the education

of children. Though recovery itself did not take place in this study, the study identified four key implications for successful recovery: 1) consistent and clear communication between all players involved in recovery, 2) staff and principal input into the decision to adopt the intervention model to be used for recovery, 3) the establishment of clearly defined roles for the principal, intervention leader, and staff prior to the beginning of the recovery intervention model, and 4) adequate and sufficient training, financial support, and materials to operate the intervention model both before and during recovery. Further research in this area might examine two instances of takeovers of low-performing or failing schools, with the variable being the philosophy behind the takeover, such as recovery versus reconstitution, for the purpose of identifying similarities and differences between approaches as well as the results of each.

Optimally, this study might have continued beyond the first year of recovery to afford a more comprehensive view of recovery over an extended period of time. Perhaps true recovery was just beginning at Peck Elementary School at the conclusion of this study due to the reported sense of hope, empowerment, and renewal expressed by the principal during the final interview, as he dusted off his hands and began determined preparation toward lifting Peck Elementary from the ashes of what proved to be, at the very least, a trying experience. However, by design, this study spanned but one year. Still, it is possible that insight gained from this study might assist others attempting recovery in similar situations, as educators tackle the demands and challenges involving low-performing and failing American schools, in an effort to recover each of those schools—one school at a time.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview 1

1. Tell me about the events leading to your school being classified as *does not meet* state standards.
2. What was your reaction to this news?
3. How did you and your superintendent plan for the school improvement team?
4. How did you communicate information to your faculty?
5. Tell me about the faculty's reaction to finding out that their school was classified as a does not meet standards' school.
6. Tell me about the parent's reaction to finding out that their school was classified as a does not meet standards' school.
7. How was this information communicated to different stakeholders?

Interview 2

1. During Interview 1, several themes emerged throughout. I'd like to review those at this time and ask you to tell me if these themes are consistent with the intentions and perspectives you expressed during Interview 1. Please alert me if there is any clarification needed on any of them or if my observation and interpretation of these themes is incorrect. If you have anything to add regarding your perspectives, please feel free to do so. Please add any perspectives you feel I may have missed during Interview 1. Also, please confirm whether these themes are correct.

2. First, I identified your perspective of challenges with communication at the following levels: central office, staff, the school improvement team, America's Choice program, and with the team leader from the school improvement team. Is this consistent with your intended responses?
3. Second, I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to conflict, including difficulties surrounding the relationship with the team leader, mutual trust, and school improvement team cooperation. Is that correct?
4. Third, I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to the school improvement team having an emotional effect on you as principal. Is this consistent with your intended responses?
5. I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to morale at the levels of principal morale, staff morale, staff morale regarding the role of the school liaison, and the emergence of polarization within the staff. Is this consistent with your intended responses?
6. I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to additional time demands due to the involvement of the school improvement team at the staff and principal levels. Is this consistent with your intended responses?
7. I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to the school improvement team intervention utilizing the America's Choice Program on the levels of added financial burdens, difficulties both obtaining and maintaining materials required to run the America's Choice Program, difficulties in establishing a master schedule suiting the school improvement team and America's Choice Program., difficulties with obtaining and scheduling from the school improvement team both the staff and

principal training required by the America's Choice program prior to the program's implementation. This includes your perspective that neither you nor the faculty has been given adequate information regarding a.) what the America's Choice Program is designed to do; b.) its components; c.) how it works in practice; and, d.) what the school improvement team expects from you and your staff. Is this consistent with your intended responses?

8. Is there anything you would like to add regarding any additional perspectives, or clarification of those aforementioned?
9. Tell me about the activities of the School Improvement Team.
10. How often do they come to your school?
11. What do they do while they are here?
12. How is the faculty reacting to their presence? How are you reacting to their presence in the building?
13. How do you communicate information between the School Improvement Team, the school, the superintendent, parents, and the external community?
14. What's been different in your work since the school was designated as such and the emergence of the School Improvement Team?

Interview 3

1. During Interviews 1 and 2, several themes emerged throughout. I'd like to review those at this time and ask you to tell me if these themes are consistent with the intentions and perspectives you expressed during Interviews 1 and 2. Please alert me if there is any clarification needed on any of them or if my observation and interpretation of these themes is incorrect. If you have anything to add regarding

your perspectives, please feel free to do so. Please add any perspectives you feel I may have missed during Interviews 1 and 2. Also, please confirm whether these themes are correct.

2. First, I identified your perspective of challenges with communication at the following levels: central office, staff, the school improvement team, America's Choice program, and with the team leader from the school improvement team. Is this consistent with your intended responses?
3. Second, I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to conflict, including difficulties surrounding the relationship with the team leader, mutual trust, and school improvement team cooperation. Is that correct?
4. Third, I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to the school improvement team having an emotional effect on you as principal. Is this consistent with your intended responses?
5. I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to morale at the levels of principal morale, staff morale, staff morale regarding the role of the school liaison, and the emergence of polarization within the staff. Is this consistent with your intended responses?
6. I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to additional time demands due to the involvement of the school improvement team at the staff and principal levels. Is this consistent with your intended responses?
7. I identified your perspective of challenges with regard to the school improvement team intervention utilizing the America's Choice Program on the levels of added financial burdens, difficulties both obtaining and maintaining materials required to

run the America's Choice Program, difficulties in establishing a master schedule suiting the school improvement team and America's Choice Program., difficulties with obtaining and scheduling from the school improvement team both the staff and principal training required by the America's Choice program prior to the program's implementation. This includes your perspective that neither you nor the faculty has been given adequate information regarding a.) what the America's Choice Program is designed to do; b.) its components; c.) how it works in practice; and, d.) what the school improvement team expects from you and your staff. Is this consistent with your intended responses?

8. Is there anything you would like to add regarding any additional perspectives, or clarification of those aforementioned?
9. Tell me about what has happened since the last time I was here.
10. Where is the school in relation to implementing change and/or suggestions of the external School Improvement Team?
11. Tell me about your workload … what's different?
12. Tell me about what you are currently learning about being a principal and school improvement.
13. Tell me about how the teacher's are responding to the School Improvement Team's presence in the building.
14. How do you now work with teachers? What is your role in working with teachers since the School Improvement Team has arrived?
15. What have been your observations about the teachers since this process started?

16. Please reflect on how the process of the state school improvement team's intervention has affected you both personally and professionally.

Interview 4

1. Tell me about what has happened since the last time I was here.
2. Where is the school in relation to implementing change and/or suggestions of the external School Improvement Team?
3. Tell me about your workload … what's different?
4. Tell me about what you are currently learning about being a principal and school improvement.
5. Tell me about how the teacher's are responding to the School Improvement Team's presence in the building.
6. How do you now work with teachers? What is your role in working with teachers since the School Improvement Team has arrived?
7. What have been your observations about the teachers since this process started?

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the research entitled "A Case Study: Recovering an Elementary School—The Perspectives of One Principal in Central Georgia," which is being conducted by Robert F. Sumowski, a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Georgia, 478-745-5044. I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of my participation, to the extent that it can be identfied as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The work of external school improvement teams is a growing phenomenon in the State of Georgia. Research into the perspectives of principals experiencing the work of external school improvement teams is sparse. The reason for this research is to identify the perspectives of a principal experiencing the work of an external school improvement team.

The researcher will spend time with the participant (the principal) for two full days and conduct five interviews with the participant during the 2001-2002 school year, through June 1, 2002. No discomforts or stresses are foreseen. No risks are forseen. Any information the researcher obtains about me as a participant in this study, including my identity, will be held confidential. My identity will be coded, and all data will be kept in a secured, limited access location. My identity will not be revealed in any publication of the results of this research. The results of this participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent unless otherwise required by law. The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 478-745-5044. Dr. Sally J. Zepeda, associate professor of educational leadership is directing this research project and can be reached at 706-542-0408.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form. Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one and return the other to the researcher.

Signature of Researcher. Date

Signature of Participant. Date

Note: Research at the University of Georgia that involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. For questions or problems about your rights, please call or write Chris A. Joseph, Ph. D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411. Telephone (706) 542-6514. E-mail Address: IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW REFLECTION FORM

Interview Date: _____ Participant _____

Today's Date _____

1. Ideas heard during the interview

2. Information obtained related to questions

3. New questions to pursue with other contacts

4. Follow-up questions

APPENDIX D

THE RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

As a classroom teacher, I shared the impressions of many of my colleagues regarding the daily activities of school leaders in my occasional trips to the school office for various reasons. Given the view from my little corner of the classroom universe, the idea of being a principal looked vary appealing. Principals went to meetings. I liked meetings. Principals handled discipline. I had a good grasp on classroom management, and like my colleagues, I had my own opinions regarding how discipline referrals should best be handled. Principals dealt with parents. They went to meetings with the superintendent. They even had lunch at restaurants from time to time. "I can do that," I thought. I went back to college, got a degree in administration, and prepared myself for the big leap when I joined the local leadership development program. Then I got just what I had asked for.

Without question, my first year as an assistant principal was the most difficult experience I have had in my twelve years as an educator. As an assistant principal, I saw the daily experiences and responsibilities of school leadership first hand, from bee stings on the playground to frightening cases of child neglect and abuse. I dealt with traffic jams on the bus ramp, handled most of the school's discipline, helped in the cafeteria, learned to smile politely while parents screamed at me for one reason or another, dialed disconnected phone numbers when needing to contact parents during emergencies, fielded complaints from whining teachers, and never quite reached the bottom of the mountain of urgent paperwork that covered my desk.

I have witnessed first hand the awesome levels of responsibilities and duties placed on principals. As principals and assistant principals, I found that regardless of new programs we implemented, we could not control for all of the problems many of our kids faced daily: dysfunctional home situations, lack of emotional and physical nourishment, disparities in ability levels, neglect, disabilities, etc. We can put programs in place to assist children, but there are still so many troubles facing children that cannot be prevented or planned for in advance. We made so much progress with some students in areas that will never appear on achievement tests.

Still principals are held responsible when children fail to perform. When test levels dip, principals are often left pondering their futures. When I hear about principal shortages, I am no longer surprised. The job calls for so many talents as well as the ability to juggle duties and responsibilities almost constantly.

I left the realm of school level leadership to assume a new position as a staff member at my county's central office, where daily experiences could not have been more different. Central office administration views school sites from a completely different angle: that of the outsider peering into a fishbowl. About the only thing the two experiences had in common was the fact that I still wore a necktie to work every day. From the central office vantage point, I saw schools that appeared to be lagging, site policies that seemed irrational, and the myriad problems encountered when handling district wide policy.

The view also afforded a new perspective when looking at principals. I heard arguments from complaining parents regarding decisions made by some principals, many of which seemed logical. I saw principals who still believed in autocracy. I saw

committed principals who quietly changed the lives of their staff and students. I watched come principals who operated on autopilot, coasting through their last few years before retirement. My supervisor was contacted by one livid principal after I addressed her by her first name in an E-mail. I wondered aloud if some principals had anything better to do with their time.

I have had the opportunity to view the principal through the eyes of a teacher, a fellow colleague, and a central office staff member. Each view is quite different depending on the perspective afforded the observer. This study provided yet another angle through which to examine the complex experiences and challenges faced by the school principal.

APPENDIX E

ANALYSIS OF THE JOB DESCRIPTION

The description of the position of Peck Elementary included the following information:

Broad Function

The principal has immediate responsibility for the operation, leadership, and control of his school in making the school facility an attractive, pleasant, and productive place in which to learn and work and for maintaining a position of dignity, usefulness, and respect in the school community.

Responsibilities

Instruction

- Supervises the instructional program of the school.
- Coordinates activities related to the implementation of the curriculum.
- Studies, with the staff, the curriculum and recommends revision in accordance with the pupils' needs.
- Cooperates with the Central Office in maintaining and improving the system-wide curriculum and instructional programs.
- Encourages and provides opportunities for in-service and professional growth of teachers.
- Interprets rules and regulations of the Board of Education.
- Encourages the acquisition and use of instructional materials and equipment.
- Makes provision for substitute teachers.

- Places pupils within the school.
- Counsels and guides pupils.

Organization and Management

- Makes decisions related to the organization and management of his school.
- Handles records and reports.
- Supervises maintenance and operation of building, grounds, and facilities.