CONNECTING PRINCIPAL SUCCESSION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

A CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

by

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(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this interpretative qualitative study was to explore the connections between principal succession and professional learning through the analysis of the current practices in leader identification, development, support, and retention in two Georgia (USA) school districts. The findings of the cross-case analysis were summarized in five major themes: (1) A key component to the overall success of principal professional learning and succession is a visionary superintendent; (2) Planning for principal succession, school districts strongly favor the local applicants; (3) In light of the anticipated principal turnover, growing leaders from within the district is an effective way to ensure leader continuity; (4) In the process of growing future principals, school districts express strong preference for the non-university leader preparation programs, tailored to the needs of their districts; and (5) Leader professional development and succession are tightly connected, as demonstrated by the school districts' practices in the preparation, support, and retention of principals.

This study also explored how the central office leaders conceptualized principal effectiveness. The membership categorization analysis revealed that central office leaders

believed that an effective principal was an instructional leader, who: (1) had a track record of being an effective leader; (2) was a perfect fit to the school; (3) was able to address the needs of the school; (4) was identified as leader by others; (5) was a team player; (6) was the data leader in the school; (7) was a technology leader; (8) was a community leader; (9) was focused on results; and (10) had a passion for education, and for working with teachers and students. These findings support the major trends in the leadership literature about the changes that occurred in educational administration in the accountability era.

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on educational administration by exploring the practitioners' beliefs about the principalship and offer implications for principal preparation, socialization, and professional development. Overall, this study enriches the body of research on principal succession and professional learning and suggests implications for redesign of the university leaders preparation and district-based professional development and leader succession planning.

INDEX WORDS: Principal succession; Principal professional learning; Principal preparation; Thematic analysis; Membership categorization analysis; Case study

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DEDICATION

Like many others, this dissertation is dedicated to the family. I dedicate this work to people who have always been there for me and supported me every step of this doctoral journey—my parents, my brother and his family, my grandmother, and to my husband.

To my dear mother and father—you always believed in me and encouraged me in pursuit of my goals, even when these goals were far-reaching and seemingly impossible. To my grandmother—you made me look beyond the constraints of a doctoral program, and you taught me to think globally about my actions. To my brother and sister-in-law—you always found the time to listen and to support me. To my niece and nephews—you made me laugh at my mistakes and taught me not to look at everything so seriously. Finally, to my husband—you have shared with me every day of this doctoral program; you have gone through all the ups and downs of the process with me; and you have always found something positive to focus on and to look forward to.

Without all of you, I would not be writing this dedication as the final section of the dissertation. Your unconditional love and ever-lasting support have made me who I am today and have made this dissertation possible.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF EXCERPTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The position of a school principal has undergone significant changes over the last

decades (Behar-Horenstein, 1995; Catano & Stronge, 2006; Lyons, 1999; Niesche, 2010;

Stronge, 1993; Whitaker, 2003). The shift in principal roles began most notably with the report,

A Nation at Risk (1983). This shift has been characterized as a transition from a manager

responsible for buildings to an instructional leader accountable for student achievement

(Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cascadden, 1998; Fink, 2010; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress,

2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lyons, 1999). The present study

contributes to the discourse surrounding the principalship by exploring the connections between

principal succession and professional learning.

Normore (2004b) analyzed the work of school administrators in light of increased

accountability, and reported that many school districts failed to attract people for administrative

positions, concluding that "currently, school administrators are very conscious of the pressure of

changing social, political and professional expectations" (p. 71). Normore (2004b) asserted:

> [L]eadership development cannot be treated as a lone concept in isolation, but rather as a
> component of organizational governance and procedural structures within a school
> district whereby clear expectations and limitations are set in terms of followers' beliefs,
> actions, attitudes and abilities. (p. 72)

With the alarming reports about principal shortages (Bush, 2008; Roza 2003; Walker & Kwan,

2009), principal succession planning is important to ensure school effectiveness.

However, principal succession and succession planning in school settings have not been

systematically studied (Bengtson, 2010; Zepeda, Bengtson, & Parylo, 2012). Furthermore,

"while various authors emphasize different aspects of succession planning, there appears to be considerable agreement on the need to connect goal setting, recruitment, development, accountability practices and leadership succession" (Fink & Brayman, 2004, p. 433). One theme was found across the studies on the effects and types of leadership succession—more research is needed to explore this important area (Bengtson, 2010; Fink, 2011; Fink & Brayman, 2004; Hart, 1991; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Zepeda, Bengtson, & Parylo, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Increased responsibilities along with the retirement of baby-boomers and inadequate preparation for the principalship have contributed to principal shortages (Hargreaves & Dean, 2006; NASSP, 2000; Walker & Kwan, 2009). It has been reported that frequent change of principals may negatively affect school climate and student learning (Griffith, 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Rowan & Denk, 1984). While researchers studied the causes for principal shortages, principal responsibilities, and professional development, little is still known about principal succession and its relation to principal preparation and development. Fink and Brayman (2004) summarized, "while various authors emphasize different aspects of succession planning, there appears to be considerable agreement on the need to connect goal setting, recruitment, development, accountability practices and leadership succession" (p. 433). The present study responded to this need by exploring the connections between principal succession and professional learning.

The supply and demand of principals have raised considerable attention to the issues of principal succession over the last decade (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Roza, 2003). Frequent changes of principals may negatively affect school climate and student learning and may become the critical events in the life of a school (Berry, 2004; Fink & Brayman, 2004). Thus, effective

2

succession planning is needed to minimize the negative effects of principal turnover. However, formal leader succession planning in public education is not a common practice and needs further development and investigation (Bengtson, Parylo, & Zepeda, 2010; Fink, 2005, 2011).

Given that there is a gap in literature about principal succession planning, this study focused on a single aspect of this phenomenon—the the role of professional learning in principal succession. This study was timely because of the need to further explore the concept of principal succession in the light of increased accountability and principal shortages reported nationwide. The study aimed to inform educational policy and to provide school administrators with the information about the ways to improve principal development and leader succession in their schools and districts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the connections between principal succession and professional learning through the analysis of the current practices in leader identification, development, support, and retention in two Georgia school districts. The researcher sought to understand the building level and the central office leaders' experiences of and perspectives about leader succession and professional learning provided for current and aspiring principals in their districts. This study situated professional learning in the context of principal succession. Three major aspects of this topic were targeted: professional development provided for current administrators; professional learning as an instrument for preparing prospective school leaders; and the relationship between professional learning and principal succession.

The primary goals of this study were three-fold:

- To position professional learning in the context of principal succession;

- To analyze the use of professional learning in supporting current principals and growing future leaders; and,

- To examine the relationship between professional learning and principal succession.

To achieve these goals, data collected via individual, in-depth interviews and documents were analyzed and interpreted.

To examine principal succession and professional learning, two school systems in the state of Georgia were selected. The systems were selected based on their size, demographics, location, adequate yearly progress (AYP), and socio-economic status. To study the complex phenomena of principal succession and professional learning, participants were selected from the building level and the central office level leaders in the participating systems. While principals provided descriptions of their experiences regarding professional learning and succession, central office participants provided valuable insights as people who designed and coordinated leader professional learning and succession efforts in their districts.

This study sought to analyze the role of professional learning in principal succession in the context of two participating school systems. The researcher examined principal professional learning and succession, looking for the links between these two phenomena as expressed by the participants. Professional development initiatives and programs provided for the aspiring and sitting principals related to succession planning were examined. Finally, the researcher looked for evidence of the connection between professional learning and principal succession.

Although researchers expressed concerns about principal succession since the 1980s (Fink, 2010, 2011; Hart, 1991; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985; Normore, 2004a), the relationship between succession and professional learning has not been systematically studied. In business, leadership succession has been at the center of attention for decades as an area crucially

important to the success of an organization (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Pynes, 2004). In education, however, strategic succession planning is rare, and few empirical studies have addressed this complex phenomenon (Bengtson, 2010). Nevertheless, research indicated that successful schools had effective leadership with high retention and low turnover (Griffith, 1999; Fink & Brayman, 2004).

School systems with strategic succession plans were more likely to retain high-performing principals and prepare future school leaders (Hargreaves, 2005). Moreover, effective professional learning should be central to succession planning as a system of support and growth for current administrators and an instrument for preparing future school leaders. This inquiry was timely as there have been few studies conducted that addressed principal succession and succession planning. To date, no studies have been found that examined the relationship between the phenomena of school leader succession and professional learning.

Background of the Study

In business, leadership succession has been examined and theorized (Bolton & Roy, 2004; Fink, 2011; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Pynes, 2004), while in school settings, leadership succession has not been systematically studied. Although the concept of principal succession has been discussed since the 1980s, the change in principals' roles and responsibilities requires closer examination of school leader succession. Moreover, research is needed to better examine succession and its essential relationship to other processes pertaining to school leadership. This study addressed the connection between principal succession and professional learning.

The earliest model of principal succession was suggested by Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) who listed environmentally controlled issues such as poor performance and degradation as major

5

reasons for principal dismissal. Hart (1991) placed an emphasis on the impact that school leadership has on student achievement, and highlighted the importance of planned principal succession that she defined as "the process of replacing key officials in organizations" (p. 451). Hart (1991) asserted that principal succession should be viewed from a multidirectional, social viewpoint, and she singled out socialization as an important component of principal succession.

Hargreaves (2005) based his leader succession model on the examples from the business sector. Discussing the importance of principal turnover, Hargreaves (2005) emphasized:

> One of the most significant events in the life of a school is a change in its leadership. Yet few things in education succeed less than leadership succession. Failure to care for leadership succession is sometimes a result of manipulation or self-centeredness; but more often it is oversight, neglect, or the pressures of crisis management that are to blame. (p. 163)

Hargreaves (2005) stated that leadership is frequently mistakenly tied to seniority, and therefore, the best people for the position may not be appointed. Hargreaves emphasized the importance and necessity of planned continuity as well as inbound, insider, and outbound knowledge and asserted that succession should not be viewed as "just a temporary episodic problem in individual schools, but a pervasive crisis in the system" (p. 164).

Like Hargreaves (2005), Fink and Brayman (2004) warned against seniority as a succession criteria and stated, "School jurisdictions will need to think in terms of the abilities and backgrounds of leadership teams rather than putting together senior management teams in a piecemeal fashion" (p. 446). Based on the analysis of the literature on leadership succession from education and business, Fink and Brayman (2004) suggested that succession planning should be viewed as a major policy issue by every school system, and they emphasized that succession plans should be linked to leadership recruitment, preparation, selection, assignment, induction, and professional learning.

One of the important aspects of developing future leaders and supporting current principals is professional learning. Assor and Oplatka (2003) emphasized that professional development for principals should be focused and lead to a clearly defined goal. In addition, Assor and Oplatka (2003) highlighted that professional learning for principals should be planned to achieve basic needs, interests, and talents, form moral and educational vision, and should help principals to construct adaptation skills that are contextualized to the settings in which they serve.

Principal shortages nationwide illustrated the need for the professional learning and preparation of future leaders to be well planned (Bush, 2008). To be effective and to fulfill its purpose, professional learning for principals should display several major characteristics. To be functional, professional learning should encompass school development, curriculum development, and personal development (Cardno, 2005); provide procedural and conceptual knowledge (Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005); enhance career development, and help principals cope with ethical issues they may face (Dempster & Berry, 2003). In addition, professional learning should be carefully planned (Evans & Mohr, 1999, Hopkins-Thompson, 2000); include an evaluation component (Grogan & Andrews, 2002); center on student achievement (Haar, 2004); have a clear mission (Peterson, 2002); and focus on instructional leadership, capacity building, and personal renewal (Houle, 2006).

Conventional wisdom holds that professional learning is an essential component of effective succession planning, incorporated in preparing future leaders and supporting current principals. Over the last decade, multiple reports emphasized the importance of preparing and developing effective principals; however, the preparation and professional development programs have been slow to change (Cardno, 2005; Evans & Mohr, 1999; Hess & Kelly, 2007).

7

To be effective in an accountability era, principals should be able to lead and support instruction, create a school dedicated to learning, and connect the school to an outside world (Hale & Moorman, 2003). However, the majority of current principal preparation programs focus on managerial abilities, overlooking instructional leadership skills (Hess & Kelly, 2007).

To effectively manage principal turnover, professional learning should serve as a system of leader support. However, it was reported that too much of the current professional development offered to educational leaders is episodic, fragmented, and disconnected from the real work and challenges of a principal (Duncan, 2011; Evans & Mohr, 1999; Rieckhoff & Larsen, 2011). One-day, topical professional learning for principals was found to be ineffective (Cardno, 2005; Evans & Mohr, 1999). This type of professional learning does not account for different career stages of school leaders, the varying contexts in which they lead, and for the individual needs that principals have.

To ensure that the principal will stay in the leadership position, preparation and induction should be followed by continuous professional learning; however, this does not always occur in practice (Cardo & Fitzgerald, 2005). At the same time, professional learning without continual support to nurture the transfer of skills and knowledge into practice rarely produces gains in learning and, therefore, is ineffective (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002; Hord, 2009).

In spite of the attempts to ensure leadership continuity in the systems, central office leaders may not have the opportunities to learn how to effectively support the work of principals from a system's perspective (Knapp, Copland, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). Research concluded that professional learning seldom takes into account the work practitioners must do well to achieve district mission, vision, and goals; the conditions of practice that influence their work; or the strengths and liabilities the individual leader brings.

Without carefully planned and implemented professional development, one cannot ensure high retention and low turnover of school leaders. Because professional learning is an important component of principal identification, preparation, induction, and professional growth, it is related to principal succession and should be regarded as a necessary component of an effective school leader succession plan.

Research Questions

Given that the purpose of this study was to examine the connections between professional learning and principal succession, both areas of school leadership were examined. Considered individually, professional learning and succession of school leaders were two broad topics that generated a multitude of questions. Studied together, these areas raised many important questions. What professional development practices are most effective and should be a part of a system's succession plan? What is the role of professional learning initiatives in effective principal succession? What are the connections between a system's succession plan and professional development plan? Should they be connected? If so, who should be responsible for that? Several studies are needed to answer all of these questions.

This study addressed one area related to principal succession; namely, the relationship between principal professional learning and succession. Three major aspects of this topic were targeted: professional learning provided for current administrators as a system of support; the role of professional learning in preparing prospective school leaders; and the relationship between professional learning and principal succession. The study was guided by the following overall research questions:

1. How do current leader identification, development, support, and retention practices foster principal professional growth and build leadership pipeline?

2. How do the district leaders describe an "effective" principal in conversations on leader professional development and succession planning?

3. In the context of participating districts and school leaders, what is the relationship between principal succession and professional learning?

These questions informed the choice of theoretical framework, study design, and data collection and analysis methods.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study was framed within the interpretative qualitative research paradigm. Interpretative researchers collect and analyze verbal data that "are usually richer, in a language sense, than positivist data and, perhaps because of this quality, the methodology of the interpretative researchers is described as qualitative" (Bassey, 1999, p. 43). The epistemology or a "theory of knowledge" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3) of this study was constructionism based on a "view that all knowledge, and therefore, all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42).

The theoretical framework for the study combined symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. Rooted in understanding of social interactions, symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) assisted in exploring the participants' experiences of, perceptions about, and interpretations of professional learning and succession they experienced and helped to analyze participants' definitions and descriptions of these processes (Denzin, 1992; Rock, 2001). Because symbolic interactionism focused on interactions to better understand the individuals (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2004), it helped the researcher to understand the participants' experiences and to interpret their responses to answer the research questions of the study. The

data for the study were collected predominantly by interviews, since interview data are commonly used for analysis in qualitative studies (Denzin, 1992; Rock, 2001).

Another framework guiding this study, ethnomethodology, allowed the researcher to look at how participants made sense of the interview topics (i.e., professional learning, succession, "effective" principal). Ethnomethodology examines how members of society make sense of one another's utterances and actions. However, the focus of analysis shifted from exploring the participants' perceptions and interpretations of reality to the participants' sense-making in the conversation process of describing their experiences of professional learning and succession. This analysis adopted an approach advocated by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) who asserted that analysis of interview data deals with the content of the communicated topics (thematic interactionism) and examines how these topics transpired in interaction (membership categorization analysis). Ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism originated as alternatives to a positivist approach to conducting research and approach data analysis from a similar perspective; thus, they are compatible to be used alongside in a study.

The conceptual framework of this study drew from the theories about management succession (Rowan & Denk, 1984), principal succession (Hart, 1991), business model-inspired theories of principal succession (Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003), and principal turnover (Jones & Webber, 2001). This study was informed by the following concepts from principal professional development theories: goals of professional learning (Assor & Oplatka, 2003), mission of professional development programs (Peterson, 2002), well-planned nature of effective professional learning for school leaders (Evans & Mohr, 1999), and the continuous nature of successful principal professional learning (Engelking, 2008; Metais, 1997; Sorenson, 2005).

The choice of qualitative methods for this study was reflected in the nature of the research questions, and the methods were aligned with the purpose of the study—to find the connections between principal succession and professional learning, and to examine how the latter informed principal succession planning. Because there was little research found in the literature on principal succession planning in general and on the relationship between professional learning and principal succession in particular, a qualitative approach had the potential to inform this field of research through the analysis and comparison of professional learning for principals and its role in principal succession as expressed by principals, superintendents, and central office personnel who participated in this study. Qualitative methods were chosen to investigate the experiences of participants related to professional learning and succession planning narrated in a case study design format. The final representation of the work took form of two single case study descriptions followed by a cross-case analysis.

Overview of the Research Procedures

This qualitative study was framed broadly within the research design of a case study (Creswell, 1998) and was situated in the context of two public school systems in Georgia. Case study was defined as a type of inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13); explores a bounded system "through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61); and examines the case to answer research questions by abstracting the evidence collected from the case setting (Gillham, 2000).

Major components of case study design were included in developing this study (Yin, 2003). Research questions were developed to conform to case study requirements and study propositions were based on the initial literature review. Principal professional learning and

succession were selected as two major units of analysis. The cases were bounded by data collection time and geographic location of the research sites.

Because "the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27), a case and units of analysis were identified. A case in this study was an institution, a school system; the two units of analysis included professional learning and succession. Thus, this study explored two single case studies followed by the cross case analysis that compared the findings across the participating systems to find practices of and beliefs about principal professional learning and succession to link these two phenomena. The qualitative design for this study was an exploratory embedded multiple-case study (Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2003). The exploratory nature of this study was reflected in its goals to investigate principal succession and professional learning; the case study was embedded because it involved two units of analysis—professional learning and succession of school leaders.

Stake (2010) asserted that for cross-case analysis, the cases should have similar aspects. In this study, two single cases focused on the same setting (two school systems in Georgia); had similar participants who, at the time of data collection, served as building or central office leaders. The participants were interviewed twice following the interview protocols on principal succession and professional learning. This study relied on several sources of data: interviews, documents (artifacts), and observational data for triangulation and data saturation purposes (Hakim, 2000; Yin, 2003). The data used in this research were a part of a larger study, funded in part by the Wallace Foundation. The larger study was a cross-case analysis of four school systems in Georgia that focused on the examination of effective, promising, and new generation practices in principal socialization, professional development, supervision and evaluation, and succession (Zepeda et al., 2009).

Although this case study incorporated some descriptive accounts of phenomena of interest, the researcher presented the cases in the form of the major themes and constructs that emerged in the data analysis process. Thematic coding and membership categorization analysis (MCA) were used for data analysis. Thematic coding procedure and elaboration of codes, themes, and theoretical constructs followed the process suggested by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Thus, the codes were merely used to identify recurring ideas; the themes were developed based on the analysis and categorization of codes/ideas; and then, the theoretical constructs were identified to combine the themes into the overarching groups. The documents and artifacts that were collected from the participants and downloaded from the systems' websites were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and the findings from this analysis were incorporated in the themes that resulted from thematic analysis.

The thematic analysis yielded major themes relevant to the participants' experiences of and perceptions about principal professional learning and succession, MCA expanded and enriched the initial analysis by exploring the membership categorization resources that school leaders used to describe an "effective" principal in the context on their district while talking about leader succession and professional learning. The choice of the descriptions of an "effective" principal was purposeful as this topic was central to the participants' accounts of principal professional learning and succession in their districts. Furthermore, examining 'how' participants talked about principal professional learning and succession (MCA) enriched the findings of 'what' they have said about these topics (thematic analysis).

Significance of the Study

Although researchers have expressed concerns about principal succession since the 1980s, this topic has not been systematically studied in schools as much as the topic has been

14

explored in other sectors such as business and industry (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hart, 1991).

Research showed that successful schools had effective leadership with high leader continuity

(Brayman & Fink, 2004; Hill, 2008). The school systems that had strategic succession plans

were more likely to retain high-performing principals and prepare future effective school leaders

(Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). Effective professional development is central to succession

planning as a system of support and growth for current administrators and an instrument of

preparing future school leaders. This study was timely, as to date, there have been few studies

found that addressed principal succession and succession planning and even fewer that analyzed

professional learning as an essential component of principal succession.

This study contributed to educational research by exploring the concepts that needed

further development and investigation—principal succession and succession planning as related

to professional learning. The empirical significance of the study was that the findings

contributed new knowledge about principal professional learning and principal succession, and

particularly, about the role of professional learning in principal succession.

The methodological significance of the study lies in the innovative approach to

theoretical framing of this research as the data were analyzed through a different theoretical lens.

This study is the first in the principalship research to combine symbolic interactionism and

ethnomethodology as theoretical perspectives that have not been used in previous studies that

addressed principal professional learning and succession. By doing so, this study contributed to

the overall body of research on methodological issues framing these theoretical perspectives.

 Because of the acknowledged need for more research on principal succession in the

accountability climate, school systems would be able to gain valuable insights from the results of

this study. The findings could enrich the knowledge base about principal succession and

professional learning in PreK-12 community. This study might inform the larger field of school leadership by reporting the ways in which professional learning may assist in principal succession planning. This study provides information for principals, schools, and central office personnel about the ways to effectively plan for succession of school leaders and incorporating professional learning in principal succession, adding practical significance to this study.

Assumptions of the Study

The major underlying methodological assumptions for this study were that the participants had experienced the phenomena of interest (professional learning and succession) and were willing to share their experiences of and perceptions about principal professional learning and succession with the researcher. It was assumed that the number of interviews with every participant and the prolonged period of data collection (six months) resulted in building rapport with the participants, and they were willing to share their opinions about principal professional learning and succession in their districts. Other methodological assumptions included, but were not limited to believing that,

- the research sites and participant samples were varied enough to provide rich data for a case study;

- the participants were representative of school leaders in the school districts in the study;

- the use of multiple sources provided comprehensive data to make valid inferences and to triangulate the findings;

- the cases were bounded by the time of data collection and by the research sites selected for the study; and,

- the belief that a small number of research sites can provide sufficient information for a rich and detailed case study (based on Merriam, 1998).

Principals were assumed to be active adult learners who strived to be successful school leaders to increase student achievement and to effectively manage all school operations.

It was assumed that both school systems in the study provided some form of professional learning for sitting and aspiring leaders and had experienced (planned or unplanned) principal succession. In addition, it was presupposed that principal professional learning was linked to principal succession; however, the *strength* of this connection was not presupposed. However, the nature and characteristics of succession and professional learning for current and aspiring leaders were not assumed and were discovered in the process of data analysis and interpretation.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the main terms used in this research were defined. These definitions were based on theories of management and succession, adult learning, and professional learning.

Professional Learning—any program, event, or initiative aimed at personal and professional growth of an individual. It can be planned or unplanned, individual or group event, and be either continuous process or one-time initiative (Assor & Oplatka, 2003; Cardno, 2005; Rieckhoff & Larsen, 2011; Zepeda, 2011).

Principal Succession—a process of leaving and entering school leadership positions by the individuals throughout their careers in education (Hart, 1991; Fink 2010, 2011; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Succession Plan—a strategic way to ensure effective principal succession. Succession plan is a formal account of activities, events, and programs that occur in the system to ensure leadership continuity and renewal (Rothwell, 2005).

Succession Planning—a formal process of planning to fill administrative positions in a

17

school system that will become vacant in the (near) future (Hargreaves, 2005; Hart, 1991). This study focused on analysis of principal succession in two school districts in Georgia and the role of professional learning in this process.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the participants (principals, central office leaders, and superintendents in the select system), data collection sites (data were collected in two public school systems in Georgia), and data collection time (six months). The temporal nature of data collection may have resulted in data that were not complete or not representative of all leaders in the systems that were in the study.

The sample of the study presented its major limitations. The school systems that participated in the study were not representative of all systems in the state of Georgia. The limitations of case study as a research design included the lack of representativeness, ethical concerns, and researcher bias (Merriam, 1998). The weaknesses of the interview as the main method of data collection were evident. Some questions may have been asked in a leading form; the researcher's bias may have played a role in the way questions were asked; and the responses were not generalizable to larger audiences. In addition, the participants may have given only socially acceptable responses and may have forgotten important facts at the time they were interviewed. Finally, case study data presented a poor basis for generalization (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2003, 2006); thus, the findings of this study may not be generalized, but may be transferrable to the similar educational settings in Georgia and other states.

However, the constructionist approach to conceptualizing and conducting case studies asserts that these arguments, frequently presented as shortcomings of the interviews and case

study research, can be positioned as the potential of these approaches. Flyvbjerg (2006) defied the conventional wisdom about the case studies and asserted that

1. Context-dependent knowledge obtained from the case studies is not less valuable than theoretical or context-independent knowledge;

2. It is incorrect to assume that one cannot generalize from a case study; the reader generalizes based on what is presented in the case;

3. Case studies are important methods on their own, not only as pilot projects for theoretical hypothesis testing;

4. Case studies are not skewed toward verification of the researcher's preconceived notions; rather, they aim at falsification of those notions; and,

5. Case studies are not designed to be generalized in several overall statements; rather, they should be treated as narratives and read as a whole.

Based on his review of the literature on case studies, Flyibjerg (2006) summarized that the case study "is a necessary and sufficient method for certain important research tasks in the social sciences, and it is a method that holds up well when compared to other methods in the gamut of social science research methodology" (p. 241). In conclusion, traditionally defined limitations of case studies and interviews are not regarded as shortcomings by all epistemological approaches.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized in eight chapters. Chapter 1 describes the background and rationale for the study, the statement of purpose, the significance of the study, the research questions, definitions of the important terms, and provided an overview of limitations, research procedures, and assumptions of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to professional learning and succession of principals. As components of this review, the topics

of principal preparation, professional development, adult learning, and succession planning were addressed. Chapter 3 summarizes the study research design and methodology, specifically, the research questions, theoretical framework, rationale, data sources and data analysis were described. Trustworthiness, ethics, and validity and reliability measures were also described.

Chapters 4 through 7 present the findings of the data analysis. The findings from two single cases are provided in Chapters 4 and 5, while Chapter 6 focuses on a cross-case analysis of the findings from the individual cases. Chapter 7 presents the highlights of the membership categorization analysis of the participants' descriptions of an "effective" principal that they provided as part of their interviews on principal professional learning and succession. Finally, Chapter 8 presents the discussion of the findings from single cases and a cross-case analysis compared with the findings of other studies on principal professional learning and succession. Conclusions, implications, and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research are elicidated.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the connections between principal succession and professional learning through the analysis of the current practices in leader identification, development, support, and retention in two Georgia school districts. The researcher sought to understand the building level and central office level leaders' experiences of and perceptions about principal professional learning and succession. Three research questions guided the study:

1. How do current leader identification, development, support, and retention practices foster principal professional growth and build leadership pipeline?

2. How do the district leaders describe an "effective" principal in conversations on leader professional development and succession planning?

3. In the context of participating districts and school leaders, what is the relationship between principal succession and professional learning?

Growing complexities and demands of the position, shortcomings of traditional principal preparation and professional learning, and the lack of research on school leader progression called for further examination of principal professional development and succession. This study was timely because, in the course of the literature review, no research examining the link between principal professional learning and succession was found.

This chapter presents an overview of the four areas of literature this study has drawn from: (1) current issues surrounding the principalship; (2) principal professional learning; (3)

principal succession; and, (4) connections between principal professional learning and succession. Each section covers several different aspects related to the overarching topic of the principalship. The review of the literature on principal professional development and principal succession includes subsections that examine the methodology of the recent studies on these topics. The concluding section in this chapter examines the few studies that directly or indirectly analyzed the connections between principal professional learning and succession.

Current Issues Surrounding the Principalship

The review of the literature about principal professional learning and succession was grounded in the issues surrounding the principalship as a profession. This section provides an overview of changes that have occurred to the principal's position over the last 30 years, describes the impact of law and policy on the principalship, highlights the shortcomings of traditional principal preparation programs, and examines the challenges faced by novice principals.

The accountability era in public education not only raised an interest in student achievement and the factors influencing it, but also tied the definition of an effective school to its annual Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status. Although principals do not impact student achievement directly (Hallinger & Heck, 1998), there was evidence found of the indirect or mediated impact of principals on student achievement through their influence on school conditions, teacher hiring, and instructional quality (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Smylie & Hart, 1999). These findings have sparked an interest in the principalship, and as a result, multiple studies have focused on the issues surrounding this profession.

In a recent study that focused on the principal's factors impacting student achievement, Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff (2009) examined the relationship between school performance and three essential principal's characteristics: (1) leader education and pre-principal experiences; (2) principal experience; and (3) the participation in the principal training programs. The findings revealed little to no relationship between school performance and principal education and mixed evidence of a relationship between principal training programs and school performance. However, there was a strong relationship found between principal experience and school performance—that is, the more experienced the principal was, the more likely it was that his or her school would be performing well.

In the accountability era, principals are expected to be instructional leaders accountable for student achievement and school performance. In other words, principals, as "key factor[s] in the success of school change and improvement efforts" (Haar, 2004, p. 20), are expected to create successful, high-achieving schools. To reach this goal, principals need strong preparation and effective "professional development to improve their skills" (Thody, 1998, p. 232). One complicating factor in this scenario is ever-increasing scope of roles and responsibilities of a school leader. For example, in addition to their managerial and instructional duties, principals are responsible for the integration of new technology (Schiller, 2003), implementation of innovations in their schools (Hite, Williams, Hilton, & Baugh, 2006), and grant procurement and facilitation (Niesche, 2010).

Although the literature on the topic is replete with describing principals as instructional leaders of their schools, the very notion of instructional leadership has been growing in complexity and related responsibilities. In a recent study, Cunningham and Cordeiro (2009) noted, "One of the major tasks of educational leadership is to build both capacity and creativity

23

within existing organizations" (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009, p. 89). From the multiple

external influences, Tracy and Weaver (2000) emphasized five major factors that have impacted

the principalship: increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity of students; decreasing trust in public

education; privatization of schools; growing school violence; and accountability pressures.

While acknowledging external pressures and increased responsibilities of school leaders,

Trachtman and Cooper (2001) asserted that principals should become again 'master teachers' to

"know, use, and support best practices in classroom teaching" (p. 1). While such an approach

may bring principals closer to instruction, it is not plausible, as research indicates that principals'

responsibilities have been changing and expanding over the last three decades. The changes are

briefly discussed in the following section.

Changes in the principal roles and responsibilities. Stewart (1998) aptly noted, "it is

generally recognized that schools are profoundly affected by the many changes that occur in the

wider society and that these changes have made the task of leading and managing them

increasingly complex" (p. 129). The work of a school principal in the United States has been

changing since the 1980s. The beginning of this shift is traditionally associated with *A Nation at

Risk* report of 1983 (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Lyons, 1999). The changing roles and

responsibilities of a principal have been extensively analyzed and discussed in the research on

educational leadership (Behar-Horenstein, 1995; Catano & Stronge, 2006, 1995; Lyons, 1999;

Niesche, 2010; Stronge, 1993; Whitaker, 2003).

The most important trend in this change has been the shift from managerial

responsibilities to instructional leadership roles assumed by the principal (Browne-Ferrigno,

2003; Cascadden, 1998). Haar (2004) explained the nature of this change nothing that,

"Expectations of the principal have changed significantly over the past decade. The position has

changed from one that was largely managerial to one with an emphasis on instructional

leadership" (Haar, 2004, p. 20)

The definition of the principal's role itself has changed to emphasize instructional

leadership (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Lyons, 1999).

Aligned with the changes of the principal roles, the knowledge base required of the principals

has expanded to include:

- shared understanding and responsibility for the core mission of schooling,

- reflective practices,

- organizational resources,

- professional development,

- currency with the latest research on teaching and learning,

- learning opportunities based on knowledge gleaned from failed initiatives,

- interactive instruction,

- learner engagement,

- shared leadership,

- parental and community involvement, and

- system coherence. (Sackney & Walker, 2006)

With an increase in principals' responsibilities and required skills, the applicant pool for the

leadership positions has decreased. Walker and Kwan (2009) analyzed the questionnaire data

from Hong Kong principals and reported that professional factors (roles and responsibilities of

school principals); demographic factors (gender, age, degree); and motivational factors impacted

the willingness of assistant principals to pursue the principalship, while school factors (student

achievement and school size) were found to be not significant. Walker and Kwan (2009)

concluded that "vice principals' desire for principalship was determined by their involvement in leader and teacher growth and development in school, their age, their personal desire for growth, and a certain indifference to relational issues" (Walker & Kwan, 2009, p. 606). This conclusion emphasizes the importance of targeted and timely professional learning to support sitting principals and to develop the leadership pipeline through providing professional development for aspiring leaders.

Although the notion of principal as an instructional leader is a relatively recent development, the accountability measures are not new to the principalship. However, in the light of No Child Left Behind requirements, accountability has shifted from input measures to output measures such as student test scores. Increased public scrutiny and accountability measurements have resulted in principals' concerns over student achievement and public involvement (Crow, 2006). Cooley and Shen (2003) emphasized that increased accountability for student achievement has been added to the principal's responsibilities for facility, budget, and personnel. Sorenson (2005) linked accountability requirements to increasing pressures and tensions related to identified global economic pressures, issues of diversity and social cohesion caused by globalization, problems of social alienation, and the pressure for inclusion. Increased demands and the ubiquitous nature of accountability standards and measurements have resulted in shortages of qualified applicants for leadership positions (Cooley & Shen, 2003). Normore (2004a) highlighted that as the accountability measures in public education increased, it has become less clear what this concept meant and the implications it had on the principals' duties.

In summary, the role of the principal has increased in complexity and demands associated with the position (Fink, 2010; Sorenson, 2005). Along with the changes occurring to principal's roles and responsibilities, the position has become more stressful, demanding, and harder to

26

maintain over time thus adding to the dilemma of principal candidates shortages (Crow, 2006).

Role conflict, accountability conflict, autonomy, and responsibility conflict (Goodwin et al.,

2003), role ambiguity (Datnow & Castellano, 2001), low pay rates (Baker, Punswick, & Belt,

2010), and standards and accountability requirements (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Davis, 1998) were

further exacerbated by increasing legal concerns, inadequate preparation for the position,

insufficient support provided for novice principals, and shifting accountability requirements.

These factors influencing the principalship are examined in the remainder of this section.

  The impact of law and policy on the principalship. The impact of law on educational

policy and practice has been growing (McCann & Stewart, 1997; Stewart, 1998). Legal

concerns related to school leadership occurred in relation to the violation of the Civil Rights Act

of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Essex, 2002; LaMorte, 2002;

McCarthy, 1983). Hiring and selection practices as well as discrimination issues have also

resulted in litigations. The increase in education-related legislation and court decisions has

influenced the principal's responsibilities and changed school life (Stewart, 1998). Thus,

principals were expected to have adequate knowledge of school law related to their professional

responsibilities to avoid possible legal problems (McCann, 1996; McCann & Stewart, 1997).

  Reporting the results of the national survey of secondary school principals (n = 491),

Militello, Schimmel, and Eberwein (2009) stated that 85% of the principals were misinformed or

uninformed about school law issues. Militello et al. argued that principals should know school

laws to "establish policies and practices based on legal standards and, in addition, support staff

development so that they demonstrate an acceptable understanding of policy, regulation, and

law" (p. 28). The authors argued, "principals *want* and *need* more information about the rights

and responsibilities of their students and teachers" (Militello et al., 2009, p. 41, emphasis in the

original). The study concluded with an assertion that "principals should become more conscious, informed, and effective school law teachers of their staffs" (Militello et al., 2009, p. 42).

Militello, Schimmel, and Eberwein (2009) reported that secondary school principals did not have adequate understanding of school law and policy. One of the reasons for the lack of legal knowledge was attributed to the shortcomings of the principal preparation programs. Militello et al. (2009) shared:

> A total of 87% (424) indicated participating in a college or university school law course as part of their principal preparation and certification program. And 19% reported completing a college or university law course since assuming the principalship. An additional 58% reported participating in a comprehensive school law workshop or in-service training within 10 years. Only 5% (25 respondents) indicated they had no school law training. (Militelo et al., 2009, p. 36)

These numbers indicated that although they had the law courses offered in the preparation programs, they were perceived as ineffective, and a majority of participants reported that they were uninformed or misinformed about school law and policy issues.

In summary, research shows that principals need better preparation related to the school law and policy issues. Furthermore, it indicates that principals should assume more responsibility in educating their staff about legal issues. Broader implications of these studies indicated that principal preparation and professional learning should include legal topics. However, traditional principal preparation programs have been widely criticized for failing to adequately prepare prospective school leaders. The highlights of the discussion surrounding principal preparation are provided in the following section.

Shortcomings of principal preparation programs. As an important aspect of principal's effectiveness, school leader preparation has gained researchers' attention worldwide (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hess & Kelly, 2007). To be successful in the principalship position, leaders should be prepared professionally and psychologically

(Walker & Qian, 2006). Emphasizing the importance of principal preparation, Cowie and

Crawford (2007) asserted, "[we believe that] principal preparation is a crucial aspect of school

development and progression, and that programmes of preparation should have positive

outcomes for those who undertake them" (p. 129).

   Normore (2010) explained that "As we embrace the twenty-first century, we are faced

with a serious crisis in educational leadership preparation programs" (p. 7). Traditional

leadership preparation programs have failed to prepare principals for the complexities of the

position (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, & Foleno, 2001). Focusing on managerial issues (Hess &

Kelly, 2007) and being too theoretical in nature (Hale & Moorman, 2003), university preparation

programs have been blamed for overlooking instructional leadership currently regarded as the

major role of a principal. Based on the comparison of principal preparation in the United States,

Australia, Canada, Jamaica, Mexico, Scotland, South Africa, and Turkey, Cowie and Crawford

(2007) summarized, "despite the growth of global interest in principal preparation in the past

decade … pre-appointment preparation is, we believe, largely an 'act of faith'" (p. 129).

   Traditional principal preparation programs do not provide adequate multicultural

preparation to meet the needs of diverse American schools. Miller, Devin, and Shoop (2007)

noted that university leader preparation programs have been inadequate in preparing effective

school leaders and called for partnerships between university preparation programs and

practitioners to prepare exemplary educational leaders. As a successful example of such

partnership, Miller, Devin, and Shoop (2007) described a Professional Administrative

Leadership Academy (PALA) that partnered the university and local school districts. The

graduates of PALA described their leadership preparation as a life changing experience that

prepared them to effectively lead today's schools.

Also focusing on leadership preparation issues, Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) reported

the results of the explorative cross-case analysis of practicing administrators in six urban schools.

The findings showed the lack of multicultural leadership preparation for principals. Gardiner

and Enomoto (2006) summarized, "not one administrator recalled focusing on multicultural

issues during his or her principal credentialing. Their programs were oriented toward traditional

business management (e.g., planning, finance, management, human factors, and public

relations)" (p. 567). Gardiner and Enomoto suggested that more collaborative work between

principals and university faculty was needed to meet the needs of marginalized student groups

and to promote social justice values.

Targeting the similar concept of equity traps, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) suggested

a construct that may help university professors to prepare principals and to identify and eliminate

equity traps. McKenzie and Scheurich emphasized the importance of the principal's role:

> Arguably, the best route to influence current teachers is through the principal, who,
> research repeatedly shows, is the key to school change. For a principal to change both
> her or his own and her or his own teachers' attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors,
> the principal must be able to understand barriers to equity… (p. 628)

Thus, principal preparation programs should include courses on equity and timely and relevant

professional learning should be provided for those principals who were already in the leadership

positions and lacked this knowledge.

Wildy and Clarke (2008) questioned the usefulness of the principal preparation programs

based on the experiences of five primary school principals in Australia. The analysis of data

from individual and focus group interviews indicated that principals were able to articulate what

skills were needed to be an effective school leader; however, the participants struggled to explain

how these skills and knowledge should be acquired. Wildy and Clarke concluded that

preparation programs did not adequately prepare these principals and they had learned "on the

job, by trial and error" (Wildy & Clarke, 2008, p. 481). In summary, traditional principal

preparation is replete with multiple calls for redesign and restructuring; therefore it is hardly

surprising that practitioners and researchers designed and examined innovative leader

preparation initiatives worldwide.

New practices in principal preparation. Despite the reported shortcomings of principal

preparation programs, the preparation of school leaders has improved over the last two decades

to reflect new characteristics and responsibilities of the principalship (Weindling & Dimmock,

2006). Principal learning academies and individual learning plans were described by Behar-

Horenstein (1995) as necessary components of principal preparation and new principal

socialization. Tracy and Weaver (2000) advocated for the creation of Aspiring Leaders

Academies that would encourage talented teachers to consider principalship as a vital career.

Similarly, Tomlinson and Holmes (2001) suggested selecting promising mid-career teachers for

fast tracking into the principalship.

Lauder (2000) noticed the following trends in principal preparation programs and

recommended that new programs should include these critical components:

- Entrance requirements aligned with the demands of the principalship;

- Cohort models;

- Clear performance-based standards;

- Opportunities for individualization;

- Development and assessment of skills;

- Emphasis on reflective practice; [and,]

- Continuous program review with input from current participants. (Lauder, 2000, pp.
  23-24)

Lauder (2000) asserted that principal preparation programs should be redesigned based on the input from all constituents and be flexible to change as needed.

Restructured principal preparation programs placed higher emphasis on the principal-university connection and included new processes like data-in-a-day and problem-based learning. Quinn (2005) highlighted the need for partnerships between school districts and universities to prepare effective leaders because "only through such collaboration can all participants attain the common goal of providing competent instructional leaders, qualified and committed to meet the NCLB mandates" (p. 16). A new practice in principal preparation was 'data-in-a-day' initiative that provided aspiring principals with an opportunity to visit schools for observations and data collection on instructional practices (Ginsberg & Kimball, 2008). Similarly, Copland (2000) suggested that problem-based learning was an effective way to develop administrative problem-framing skills in future leaders.

Jackson and Kelley (2002) defined the criticism of principal preparation and asserted that many principal preparation programs were effective, exceptional, and innovative. Their analysis of six principal preparation programs revealed that effective administrator preparation was anchored in faculty, students, and the knowledge base, and these components were connected by structure, process, and strategy. Clear curriculum and constant revisions of the program were also keys to success. Jackson and Kelley (2002) summarized:

> Meaningful change requires that all stakeholders – faculty members, students, districts, practicing administrators, the state and the institution – to make a commitment to the development of high quality demanding preparation programs. These programs require more than an average time investment on the part of faculty members, students, and collaborating districts and administrators; they require a significant investment of initial and ongoing resources to support program development, ongoing collaboration and mentorship, and connections to the field; and they require a willingness to forgo income that could otherwise be obtained through larger program enrollments and programs designed to minimize disruptions of student work schedules. (p. 210)

Thus, effective principal preparation programs involve multiple stakeholders in developing a schedule, and these programs are based on close collaboration between the university and the school districts.

Based on their analysis of 14 principal preparation programs, Davis and Jazzar (2005) listed 7 habits of effective principal preparation programs: curriculum and instruction; critical learning internships, mentors, collaborative experiences, authentic assessment, research-based decision-making, and turn-key transitions (ready, set, go, succeed as related to intents, hopes, and wishes of principal preparation programs). Hopkins-Thompson (2000) singled out mentoring and coaching as integral to effective principal preparation, and they asserted that these processes (a) must be adapted to different schools to develop a network of peer support and (b) must assist districts with growing their own leaders. Similarly, Barnett and O'Mahony (2008) asserted that mentoring and coaching had impacts on five levels: (1) participants' reactions; (2) participants' learning; (3) organizational support and change; (4) participants' use of new knowledge and skills; and (5) student learning outcomes.

A common trend in recent studies on principal professional learning was the decreasing value of the university-based leadership courses. Based on the analysis of interviews from 34 principals, Zhang and Brundrett (2010) summarized that sitting principals valued mentoring and experiential learning more than formal courses. Similarly, Grissom and Harrington (2010) studied different forms of principal professional development as related to the teachers' rankings of principal performance. In a quantitative study using the data from the national representative random survey of schools, Grissom and Harrington reported that principals who invested in formal mentoring programs were ranked higher, while principals who took university courses only were ranked lower by teachers. These studies suggest that traditional principal preparation

programs are ineffective in preparing leaders to deal with the day-to-day demands of the position; the fact, supported by the challenges of the novice principals.

Challenges for the novice principals. Regardless of the experienced leader preparation, novice principals need support and developmental opportunities to succeed. Walker and Qian (2006) explained:

> As hard as it is to get there, however, even in the times many potential leaders seem less to be willing to take on the job, the slipping, sliding and uncertainty associated with scaling the pole certainly does not end when the name is nailed to the new office door. The rigors involved in the climb not only continue but actually accentuate during the first few years of the principalship. The energy previously needed to climb must be transformed quickly to balancing atop an equally tenuous surface – a spot requiring new knowledge, skills, and understanding. (Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 297)

To be effective, novice principals should establish trust and support teachers' learning (Youngs & King, 2002). Typically, new principals are typically not provided with support to mediate their transition into a new position, and yet, they are expected to possess all necessary skills and abilities to be successful from day one (Crow, 2006; Sackney & Walker, 2006). It is hardly surprising that these beginning principals feel insecure, inefficient, and incompetent.

Major problem areas for novice principals dealt primarily with issues related to instructional leadership, bureaucracy, official mandates, and dealing with different interest groups (Walker & Qian, 2006). Conley and Cooper (2011) noted that new principals "are often asked to administer the more challenging schools, such as those identified as chronically low performing in urban, suburban, and rural locations" (p. 4). As a result, these novice principals had to deal with principal hiring and retention issues and faced high teacher turnover upon assuming leadership positions.

However, principals from different countries pointed to different challenges they faced after assuming the position. Financial management, administrative overload, and unrealistic

expectations were challenges of novice principals in Australia (Quong, 2006); professional

isolation, time management, school budget, ineffective staff, site management, and implementing

new governmental initiatives were voiced by the British heads (Weidling & Dimmock, 2006);

and demographic, economic, health, cultural, and resource problems were found significant for

novice African principals (Bush & Oduro, 2006). New principals in Hong Kong experienced

external pressures about inner values and the feelings of being challenged (Cheung & Walker,

2006), while American principals dealt with four major conflicts:

1. Role conflict: conflict between the roles of strategic leader, instructional leader, organizational leader, and political and community leader;
2. Accountability conflict: conflict between being inclusive and being accountable, between meeting the diverse needs of students and meeting high standards;
3. Autonomy conflict: conflict between being responsive to mandates and being autonomous; [and,]
4. Responsibility conflict: conflict between increased accountability and the need for both professional and clerical assistance. (Goodwin, Cummingham, & Childress, 2003, pp. 27-28)

To realize new visions for the principalship and to help principals deal effectively with the

challenges they faced, McGough (2003) suggested the redesign of pre-service programs for

administrators, the use of traditional in-service professional learning, and the improvement of the

induction and assessment processes at the district level. Mangin (2007) pointed out that

communication between the district and the school was very important to create conditions most

conducive for principal development.

Wildy and Clarke (2008) outlined four key challenges for novice principals— dealing

with place, dealing with people, dealing with system, and dealing with self. Principals in this

study acknowledged issues that arose from contextual factors (social, political, and geographical

conditions of the school) and complex interactions with co-workers and parents. Wildy and

Clarke (2008) suggested that proper induction and socialization practices would help principals

to better understand the policies and practices of the school and to deal more effectively with the pressures of the system.

Petzko (2008) emphasized the shortage of qualified candidates for the principalship positions and stated that "[u]niverstity preparation programs, school districts, and the profession must collectively begin to address the specific needs of beginning principals to provide maximum support for success" (Petzko, 2008, p. 225). Petzko (2008) reported the results of a survey of new middle school and high school principals and assistant principals who attended a 2007 national principals' association conference. The participants (n=77) believed that knowledge and skills in educational leadership, curriculum, site leadership, organizational change, and student services were important to their success, while historical foundations of education and facilities were considered the least important. Petzko (2008) recommended that "graduate programs should consider the reallocation of some of the resources expended in this area [historical foundations] to those that have a higher importance rating and/or have larger positive differences between importance and preparation" (pp. 239-240).

Frequently, principalship challenges resulted in the new principal's burnout. Friedman (1995) noted the complexity of the school principal role because a school leader had to deal effectively with teachers, students, and personnel while simultaneously being a good leader and administrator. These complex requirements often resulted in principal burnout and early retirements. Friedman (1995) suggested four major characteristics of principal burnout (see Table 2.1).

Principal burnout leads to ineffectiveness and the principal's failure to do the job. Davis (1998) suggested four organizational outcomes resulting from the principal failure: high number of staff complaints; frequent parent complaints about administrators and teachers; high number

of complaints from parents about the quality of instruction; and high number of staff requests to transfer to other schools. The major reasons for principals losing their jobs were not meeting expectations for student achievement; not maintaining safety and order in the school; not having a clear vision; not accepting new ideas; not possessing administrative skills and time management; and not managing cultural diversity effectively (Davis, 1998).

Table 2.1

Characteristics of Principal Burnout

Characteristic	Description
Exhaustion	(emotional, cognitive and physical): Internally focused feelings of weariness experienced by the principal.
Aloofness	Externally focused feelings of weariness expressed by willingness to disengage and reduce the intensity of contact the principal has with staff and service recipients.
Self-dissatisfaction	Internally focused feelings of discontent (the principal expresses discontent with being a principal and indicates thwarted aspirations or desires).
Deprecation	Externally focused feelings of discontent (the principal expresses distrust in teachers, suggesting that they are not good enough for the job, etc.).

(Friedman, 1995, p. 193)

In light of the changes in the principal's roles and responsibilities, reported shortcomings of principal preparation, and the challenges of the novice and experienced principals, professional development has emerged as a way to deal with the demands of accountability era.

Furthermore, professional learning is described as a tool for enhancing principal effectiveness as a school leader (Grissom & Harrington, 2010). The major premises and constructs related to current trends in principal professional learning are discussed in the following section.

Principal Professional Learning

As a system of support, professional learning should fill in the gaps of principal preparation, assist school leaders in dealing with the increasing job requirements, and help them to develop the skills and abilities necessary to be successful principals. This section provides an overview of the literature on principal professional learning, examines the characteristics of effective professional development programs and initiatives, describes goals and models of professional learning, positions professional learning as an ongoing process, considers professional development as a form of adult learning, and analyzes the methods that have been used to explore this topic.

Broadly speaking, professional development is learning that supports administrator, teacher, and student learning, and is focused on school improvement and student learning (Zepeda, 2008, 2011). Zepeda (2008, p. 16) summarized research on the topic and stated that effective professional development:

- Extends over time;
- Includes planned follow-up;
- Is job-embedded connecting to the work of teaching;
- Is content-specific and related to subject matter;
- Promotes reflection and inquiry;
- Includes multiple modalities of learning—active engagement;
- Is site-based including teachers from the same grade level and subject area; and,

- Is based on student performance data.

Zepeda (2008) believed that professional development should be grounded in standards and curriculum and asserted:

> School personnel must begin by thinking about how and why professional development is important, focusing on the work adults do to enhance student learning. … However, coherence is needed to build purposeful relationship among and across activities, offerings, and initiatives. Alignment is needed to ensure coherence. Professional development might very well be a way to achieve coherence with tackling local, state, and national expectations for student learning. (p. 299)

Although professional development for all educators is somewhat similar, effective professional learning for principals has distinct characteristics, models and goals, and is ongoing. These aspects are briefly examined in the following sections.

Characteristics of effective principal professional learning. Professional learning is essential to a school leader's success because "[it] is the answer to developing and maintaining the type of leadership schools need to improve teaching and learning opportunities" (Haar, 2004, p. 20). Stewart (1998) summarized:

> In order to effectively manage schools in environments of complexity, specialization and rapid change, principals' professional knowledge needs to be based on a sound grasp of theories associated with leadership, management and change as well as repertoire of skills acquired from school-based experiences. (p. 129)

Hargreaves and Fink (2003) noted that the major forces that influenced change or continuity in a school were leadership, sustainability of leadership, and leadership succession. The authors asserted that sustainable leadership should be pursued to create and preserve sustainable learning. Thus, sustainable leadership will result in success over time, address issues of social justice, develop people and the environment, and sustain the leadership of other workers in the school setting.

Pounder and Crow (2005) suggested a systems approach to growing school leadership aimed at supporting novice and experienced administrators. They emphasized the importance of sitting principals, growing future school leaders, imploring, "acting school principals should purposefully identify those teachers or other educators who have clearly demonstrated leadership talent and encourage them to participate in selected leadership activities or administrator orientation programs" (p. 56). However, Pounder and Crow warned that if it was only sitting principals' responsibility to identify and to grow future administrators, there was a risk that they would choose only those people who resembled them while it was important to grow a diverse pool of candidates for future leadership positions.

Rieckhoff and Larsen (2011) used a mixed methods approach to collect and analyze the data on the role of a professional development network in leadership development. The findings of this study showed the high impact of professional learning on leadership development. Rieckhoff and Larsen (2011) also emphasized the importance of professional development schools in holistic leader development.

Professional learning is one of the important aspects of developing future leaders and supporting current leaders. Assor and Oplatka (2003) emphasized that professional development for principals should be focused and lead to a clearly defined goal. In addition, principal professional learning should strive to achieve basic needs, interests, and talents, form moral and educational vision, and construct adaptation skills that are very important for principals. As the attributes that characterized principal professional growth, Assor and Oplatka (2003) listed:

- Principals' ability to fulfill basic needs and actualize their potentialities in their work;
- Principals' capacity to restrain and moderate their immature (anxiety and deficit-based) dispositions or reaction patterns;
- Principals' ability to form and implement a vision that is based on autonomous thought on educational values and goals; [and,]

- Principals' ability to integrate new knowledge and skills and use them effectively as they cope with changing demands. (Assor & Oplatka, 2003, p. 490)

Quite contrary to the research studies that looked for immediate improvement and growth, certain types of professional learning required time and showed improvements in small increments, without visible changes. In a mixed-method study, Barnes et al. (2010) examined professional learning of urban principals who participated in a district-based professional development program. The findings of this study did not reveal any considerable changes in principals' learning or practices, but showed the refinement of principals' practices. This example demonstrated that the concept of 'effective' professional development for principals was not firmly agreed upon or defined.

Overall, to be considered effective and to fulfill its purpose, professional development for principals should have several major characteristics. Effective principal professional learning encompassed school development, curriculum development, and personal development (Cardno, 2005); provided procedural and conceptual knowledge (Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005); enhanced career development, and helped principals to cope with ethical issues they faced (Dempster & Berry, 2003). In addition, effective principal professional learning should be well-planned, not just occur as random acts of goodness (Evans & Mohr, 1999, Hopkins-Thompson, 2000); should include evaluation components (Grogan & Andrews, 2002); focus on student achievement (Haar, 2004); have a clear mission (Peterson, 2002); and should focus on instructional leadership, capacity building, and personal renewal (Houle, 2006).

Goals and models of principal professional learning. The literature review revealed numerous goals of principal professional learning. It has been suggested that professional development for principals should contribute to personal and professional development; should lead to clearly defined goals: humanistic self actualization (achievement of basic needs and

41

talents); psycho-dynamic goals (learning how to deal with problems); adaptive cognitive development (construction of adaptation skills); and moral development (Assor & Oplatka, 2003). Effective principal professional learningfocused on management development (Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005), was long-term (Haar, 2004), and was directed at the principals' needs (Marshall, Pritchard, & Gunderson, 2001).

Researchers suggested several major models of principal professional learning. One of the most commonly described models was principal professional development through mentoring (Boon, 1998; Daresh, 2004; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Fenwick & Pierce, 2002; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000; Petzko, 2004). Mentoring as a form of professional development in organizations has existed for many centuries, but in principal professional learning, mentoring as a form of professional development was recently introduced (Boon, 1998; Malone, 2001; Hall, 2008).

Although mentoring was found effective for principals across their career continuum, it was described as especially useful for novice principals (Lashway, 2003; Mitgang, 2007; Young, Sheets, & Knight, 2005). Mitgang (2007) offered "quality guidelines" that should be followed when implementing a mentoring program for new principals:

- mentors should receive quality training;
- the programs should focus on efficacy;
- the goals should support new principals;
- state and locals funds should be used to pay for mentoring programs; and,
- clear goals and unambiguous goals should be established.

Young, Sheets, and Knight (2005) advocated for formal mentoring programs for new principals, and they described that mentoring by veteran principals was the biggest gift that experienced

principals could give to novices. Lashway (2003) also recognized mentoring, new principal

academies, and the appointment of former principals to coach new principals as more

contextualized ways to prepare new principals. Lashway summarized, "a growing number of

states are supporting induction and professional development by mandating "second-level"

certification that requires formal mentoring, reflection, portfolio development, and/or on-the-job

demonstration of skills" (p. 4).

Mestry and Schmidt (2010) conducted a closer examination of a portfolio as an effective

professional development tool. The analysis of the interview data revealed that portfolios were

viewed as an alternative assessment tool that showed good standards. However, participants also

admitted that they did not receive proper training in portfolio development. Concluding in favor

of portfolio as a professional development tool, Mestry and Schmidt (2010) emphasized the

universal nature of possible application and use of portfolio in education.

Eller (2010) evaluated a professional development program provided for new principals

in Virginia. The Recently Appointed Administrators Program was launched in 2005 and offered

new principals an opportunity to collaborate and interact among themselves and to receive

instructions from effective leaders. Participants reported satisfaction with the collegial and

network aspects of the program and liked guest speakers and presenters. Among the

recommendations to improve the quality of the program, participants listed increased informal

network and better use of technology, and requested more information on role clarification and

socialization. Eller (2010) emphasized the importance of development programs for new

principals that should be tailored to their learning needs.

Duncan (2011) examined professional development needs of male and female principals

using quantitative methods and summarized that

- Less experienced principals identified higher needs for support in all areas than more experienced principals.
- Female principals identified on average higher needs for support than male principals.
- Overall, females rated support in working with conflict (student, parent and faculty issues) significantly higher than males.
- Overall, females rated support in working with sustaining personal motivation significantly higher than males. (Duncan 2011, p. 12)

The differences also occurred between urban and rural principals. Salazar (2007) emphasized that rural principals faced unique challenges and their professional learning should address these needs to ensure schools' and principals' success. Salazar summarized:

> [P]rincipals have strong preferences for activities that will help them create and sustain high-performing learning systems that ensure that all students meet high standards. Principals recognized that for effective organizational development and continuous improvement, they must build team commitment in order to create a learning organization. They realized that effective communication is essential to determining instructional direction and motivating for defined results. (p. 25)

These findings emphasized that principal professional development cannot follow one-size-fits-all approach, but should be custom-tailored to the system and the individual principal needs.

Among the other popular models of principal professional learning were peer sharing and peer support (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Hoffmann & Johnson, 2005); professional learning communities (Hipp & Weber, 2008); holistic approaches with a focus on appraisal of performance, effective leadership, and strategic management (Cardno, 2005); reflective inquiry models; and craft models of professional development for principals (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002). In addition, other processes supporting the development of leaders (e.g., principals and assistant principals, central office staff) included:

- job-embedded learning opportunities (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Haar, 2004; Hoffmann & Johnson, 2005; Marshall et al., 2001);

- career-stage considerations that accounted for prior experiences of the incumbent prior to being named a leader (Peterson, 2002); and,

- coaching that included feedback to the performance of the new principal (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000; Kostin & Haeger, 2006).

Job-embedded professional learning and career stage considerations characterized effective professional development for teachers and aspiring and sitting leaders.

Furthermore, a classification of principal professional development programs into three distinct groups differentiated between traditional models (passive learning), craft models (training by experienced principal), and systematic reflective-inquiry models (Nicholson et al., 2005). It was recommended to develop a school management program based on the needs assessment, leadership development, and final assessment as a form of principal professional development (Wong, 2004). Case studies (Cranston, 2008); portfolios (Johnston & Thomas, 2005; Zepeda, 2002, 2008); and evaluation were also suggested as powerful and authentic tools of principal professional learning (Manning, Sisserson, Jolliffe, Buenrostro, & Jackson, 2008).

Principal professional learning as a continuous quest for improvement. A considerable body of research asserts that effective professional learning is continuous (Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005; Hoffmann & Johnson, 2005; Sorenson, 2005). Continuity is essential for success of principals and teachers; however, there is no evidence that current principal professional development is continuous. Continual support was highlighted as extremely important for principals to help them deal with problems and challenges (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002). It has been acknowledged that principal induction and preparation should be followed by continuous professional development; however, in practice, ongoing professional development is often replaced with random sessions, conferences, and seminars (Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005). Traditional professional development for principals is far from being continuous; it is described as one-way training often using "in-basket training" exercises with little to no follow-up.

45

Therefore, principal professional development is often viewed as being ineffective (Evans & Mohr, 1999).

Among other "survival tactics" for new principals, Sorenson (2005) named pursuing continuing professional growth and development. To improve the quality of professional learning for principals, providers should ensure that it is ongoing with intensive follow up and support as integral components (Haar, 2004). It was also suggested that principal professional learning should include ongoing networking among principals (Hoffmann & Johnson, 2005), should be based on coordination between the school level and central level administration (Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson, & Daly, 2008), and should be sustained yearlong (Houle, 2006).

To be effective, professional learning for principals should be a continuous process (National Staff Development Council, 2000). It was noted by Sorenson (2005) that "State educational agencies are beginning to realize that more relevant pathways for selection, preparation, certification, induction, and renewal of principals are essential for continuous growth, development, and, ultimately, administrative success" (p. 62). Similarly, continuing professional learning was found important for success of principals abroad. The results of the mixed method study of principals in Hong Kong showed that continuing professional development (CPD) was essential to enhancing principal professionalism and to helping them deal with the challenges of the 21st century education (Pang, 2007).

Engelking (2008) highlighted the importance of continuous professional development, and he asserted that it could and should be provided in different forms that ranged from formal to informal. Engelking provided examples of such forms: conversations with colleagues, group discussions and forums, continuous on-the-job assignments, working with superiors, learning how to deal with adversity at the job that are more informal, as well as through coursework,

46

seminars, workshops, and development modules that are on the formal side. In addition, experiences outside the school were also found important in the continuous professional learning of principals (Engelking, 2008).

Holmes and Harding (1997) compared continuous professional development provided for school leaders in the UK and in the US, and they concluded that in both countries, continuous professional development for principals "requires an organization of a framework" (p. 136). Holmes and Harding emphasized uneven training for the principalship, and they concluded, "the challenge for continuous professional development remains: it must deliver the purposes of its audiences; but if it does not also deliver better school leaders then it had failed" (p. 146).

In a mixed method study of professional development of school leaders in Cyprus, Michaelidou and Pashiardis (2009) reported that participants were not satisfied with CPD they received and believed that it did not contribute to their professional growth. Michaelidou and Pashiardis (2009) concluded:

> The results of this study indicate that school leaders have different needs depending on the post they hold. Assistant heads seem to be less enthusiastic and more demanding than school heads about their own professional development, as they experience it through INSET/CPD. Assistant heads need more opportunities to be engaged in seminars and professional development activities related with tools for leadership and more practical (applied) help with regards to their new role. School leaders' perceptions of their professional development, as they experience it in Cyprus, imply that they need more opportunities for leadership development. Their needs are directly related to their post and duties. (Michaelidou & Pashiardis, 2009, p. 413)

These findings suggested that even if school leaders were provided with some form of continuing professional development, it did not meet all their professional needs.

Woods, Woods, and Cowie (2009) examined the need for CPD of principals in Scotland. Findings revealed differences in degree and quality of CPD provided, although participating principals saw the value in different CPD activities they have experienced. Time, workload, and

budget were listed as barriers to participation in professional development. Woods et al. (2009) also noted the differences among the participants based on their professional learning needs; particularly, the needs of new and experienced principals. In summary, Woods et al. (2009) advocated for collaborative approach to principal CPD.

Metais (1997) noted that in some European countries CPD for principals has been in place from the beginning of the 20th century and was regarded as "a key means of informing staff, enhancing their ability to implement reforms, and changing attitudes and behaviours which are no longer considered to be appropriate" (p. 152). For principals in Great Britain, continuous professional development that was traditionally offered by higher education and local authorities was changed to include competitive tendering systems for CPD contracts (Bennett & Marr, 2003; Law, 1999). Although there was no evidence found that such innovative approaches to providing CPD would be effective, healthy competition between providers could result in more options and, perhaps, better quality of professional development for school leaders.

Professional development as adult learning. Professional development of school leaders is, in fact, a form of adult learning and should be planned based on the principles of adult learning theory. Adult learning theory integrates action learning, experiential learning, self-directed, and project-based learning (Conlan, Grabowski, & Smith, 2003). To be effective, adult learning should be built on ownership, appropriateness, structure, collaboration, internalization, and motivation (Langer & Applebee, 1986).

Knowles (1980, 1992) asserted that adults are autonomous learners that are goals-oriented, relevancy-oriented, practical people with prior knowledge and experience. In addition, Knowles asserted that adults need to be respected and motivated to learn. Success, volition, value, and enjoyment are major motivating factors for adults (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson,

2005). Professional development for school leaders should allow leaders to reflect on their

practices, and be based on a clear structure and collaboration among the school stakeholders.

To be effective, professional development should be rooted in adult learning theory

principles. Zepeda (2008) emphatically reported,

> The cornerstone of successful professional development is the way in which adults are
> engaged in learning. Adults need and want to grow professionally; they desire ongoing
> learning opportunities in a place nestled within their own schools so that they can
> improve practice. … Disconnected from site or district initiatives, professional
> development activities scheduled as one-shot events have little lasting impact on adults
> and their learning, and even more negligible effect on student learning, a tightly coupled
> goal of professional development. (p. 121)

Zepeda (2008) brought forward the belief that professional development of adult learners was an

iterative process that included participatory planning, specific goals and objectives, varied

learning activities, implementing new or refined practices, feedback and support, evaluation and

results, assessing adult learner needs, and climate conducive to learning. For this iterative

process to work, clear professional development goals and follow-up activities are needed.

Methodological analysis of recent studies on principal professional learning. Over

the last decades, different methods and theoretical frameworks have been used to study principal

professional development. The articles on principal professional development published in 8

peer-reviewed journals over the course of 11 years (1998-2008) were examined (N = 104),

looking for the trends in the types of articles published, and analyzing the design of principal

professional development studies to determine the purpose for selecting methods and prevalent

research designs used (Parylo, 2011). The results of the conceptual content analysis showed that

over half of the articles (55%) on professional development for school leaders were empirical

(reporting research findings) and over a third of them (35%) were conceptual (theoretical)

papers. Such high number of conceptual papers proved that the area is being investigated and developed and new theories and concepts are being introduced to further advance the field.

As for the empirical studies, qualitative designs were the most common (22% of the total), followed by mixed method studies (18% of the total), and by quantitative studies (15% of the total number of articles found on the topic). Out of all empirical studies, mixed method designs were employed in one third of all the cases (19 or 33%). This result showed that even though qualitative designs are prevalent in research on principal professional development (40% of all empirical studies wee qualitative), mixed method designs are also frequently used. This finding mirrors the results of an analysis of all educational articles by Niglas (1999), who also concluded that "more than one third of the studies in our sample combined qualitative and quantitative aspects and/or features of inquiry" (p. 15).

Ten articles out of 104 were structured analyses of literature or meta-analyses related to the topic of principal professional development. Most of these articles offered recommendations on how to improve principal preparation and professional development of sitting principals. Major issues that were examined were principal and superintendent preparation (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Jackson & Kelley, 2002), principal growth through mentoring (Enrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004), effective leadership (Casawant & Chertkowski, 2001), and supervision and staff development (Wanzare & da Costa, 2000). The data these articles examined consisted of (mostly) peer-reviewed articles; most of these articles were traditional literature reviews, but one study (Enrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004) presented findings of a statistical analysis of results reported by hundreds of articles on the topic.

The largest group of articles (n=36) included conceptual papers. These studies included, but were not limited to, responses to other articles (Cambron-McGabe & Cunningham, 2002;

Usdan, 2002); and theoretical pieces where the authors suggested a new theory or methodology (Archbald, 2008; Burke, 2000; Webber, 2003). Most of these conceptual articles were framed within the interpretivism perspective. Case study was a common design employed by the researchers in writing conceptual pieces on principal professional development (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2000). The data examined by the authors of conceptual papers were published studies, state and national pieces, and the interview and observational data from case studies.

All quantitative studies used for this analysis were framed within objectivism as an epistemology, and post-positivism as a theoretical perspective. Survey research was prevalent; no study reported the results of the experimental research. Out of 23 quantitative studies on principal professional development, 21 examined data from surveys, 1 article provided results of statistical analysis of previously published studies, and 1 article was based on the analysis of placement and test scores. The authors of the majority of articles used ANOVA and MANOVA for data analysis; while one study employed content analysis to explore the district's hiring criteria (Schlueter & Walker, 2008). Theoretical and conceptual perspectives included job choice theory (Pounder & Merrill, 2001); role conflict theory (Eckman, 2004); leader efficacy framework (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008); instructional and transformational leadership theories (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008); and organizational theory (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999).

Quantitative studies were conducted based on the large multi district or statewide samples; one study was based on a representative national sample (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006). The studies in this category followed the same research design—the authors provided an overview of the random sample; described theoretical framework; elaborated on the instrument they used for data collection; explained how the instrument was

validated; and reported numerical results. The questionnaires used by the authors were standardized instruments that included Likert or Likert-like questions and were administered in person, online, or via the postal mail. All quantitative studies used random sample and validated measurement and scaling.

Qualitative studies on principal professional development were framed within two major epistemologies: constructionism (meaning is constructed by the mind, not discovered) and subjectivism (the subject imposes the meaning on the object) (Crotty, 1998). The most commonly employed theoretical perspective was interpretivism grounded in the attempts to explain human interactions and social world. For the articles used for this analysis, the most common theoretical perspectives were phenomenology (Oplatka, Bargal, & Inbar, 2001; Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008) and symbolic interactionism (Branson, 2007; Calabrese et al., 2008).

The methodology of the studies stemmed out of selected epistemology (constructionism and subjectivism) and theoretical perspective (interpretivism). Thus, interpretative study was the most common, two articles were phenomenological (Oplatka, Bargal, & Inbar, 2001; Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008) and three articles presented grounded theory studies (Blase & Blase, 1999; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Gaetane, 2008). The most common method was a case study (19 out of 23 studies were case studies). Two studies relied on the data from the document analysis (Eden, 1998; Peterson, 2002), while others used multiple sources of data: individual interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and observations. Finally, two studies used life stories as a main research method (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2000; Oplatka, Bargal, & Inbar, 2001).

The analysis of articles that combined qualitative and quantitative methods in research design revealed that only 3 out of 19 articles stated that mixed methods design was used. The authors of 16 articles combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies and methods, but did

not identify the design as mixed methods, even though the results from qualitative and quantitative data were integrated at the data collection and/or analysis stage. Analysis of the research methods showed that quantitative methods most frequently used to explore principal professional development were surveys and questionnaires, while the most popular qualitative methods were interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis.

The most common combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in the sample was a survey followed by the individual interviews with selected participants of those surveys (5 studies used this research design). As for the data collection, the sequential design was more frequently employed. In the sample, there were 5 simultaneous design studies (qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time) and 14 sequential designs (qualitative and quantitative data were collected at different stages of the study). Analyzing the articles according to three models of mixed methods designs suggested by Creswell (1999) for educational policy, there was 1 study employing instrument building model, 5 studies followed convergence model, and 13 studies used sequential model.

This analysis found no discernible trend in the number or type of the articles published over the last decade. There was no consistency found in the choice of the research design in studies on principal professional development. However, the number of empirical articles and the total number of articles on the topic was the lowest for the first two years in the sample (1998 and 1999) and the number of articles on principal professional learning increased in the eight years. This findings indicates an increasing interest in the topic overall and growing number of empirical studies that explore principal professional learning.

This dissertation study further explored the concept of principal professional learning. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principal professional

development and succession. The next section examines the literature on school leader

succession, focuses on the theoretical inquiries into the topic of leader succession, and analyzes

the studies of leader succession in a school setting.

Principal Succession

Along with changes in the principal's roles and responsibilities and the retirement of the

baby-boomers, succession planning for the principal's position has come to the forefront of

attention of researchers and practitioners as a process essential to the school's success and

sustainability (Fink, 2010; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hart, 1991; Normore,

2004a). Principal succession planning, or "ensuring that the right person is in the right place at

the right time for the right reason" (Fink, 2011, p. 18), is a key to school's effectiveness.

However, principal succession is a highly political process that frequently involves power

struggles among the different constituents (Fink, 2011).

With the alarming reports about principal shortages and the lack of qualified applicants

for the principalship, principal succession planning is as important as ever to ensure the

effectiveness of today's schools (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; National Association of Secondary

School Principals, 2000). Principal supply and demand issues have been reported worldwide

(Fink, 2011). In the United States, there is a range among the states in the extent of attention

paid to school leader succession. While some states still leave the future of school leadership to

chance, others develop partnerships between the Departments of Education, the universities, and

school districts to ensure that no leadership positions will remain unfilled (Wilson, 2009).

Furthermore, a lack of research on principal succession and presuccession contexts was reported

(Takahashi, 1998).

Some researchers, however, deny the reports about the principal shortages and claim that the issue is the decreased attractiveness of the position to potential applicants. Fink (2011) concluded that any "shortage of leaders is 'man-made' and policy driven and the solutions lie not with pumping more warm bodies from whatever source into a leadership pipeline and hiring and hoping that they succeed, but rather 'growing your own' pool" of leaders (Fink, 2011, p. 30).

Regardless of the nature of principal shortages, the importance of effective succession planning for school leaders is hard to overestimate. Inadequate leader succession may lead to the disruptions of school life that may become dysfunctional (Normore, 2004a). The issue of school leader succession is further exacerbated by the fact that principal progression is different in different educational contexts and different types of leaders are needed for different settings (Gordon & Patterson, 2006). Furthermore, frequently the emphasis "in most places tends to be on 'replacement planning' of incumbent leaders without any long term thought to more sustainable approaches to leadership succession" (Fink, 2011, p. 1). Drawing attention to the issues surrounding principal succession, Fink (2005) stated,

> With the high leadership turnover in education … leadership succession should be a topic of more than passing interest. Not only are there not sufficient numbers of potential leaders coming forward as the much smaller generation 'X' replaces the 'baby boom' generation, but … those that do seek leadership opportunities must address significantly different challenges from the leaders that they will replace. Ironically, a search of the internet produces a plethora of business related references and only a few that connect to education or to the public service. It appears that both are, for the most part, still tied to a traditional leadership replacement model rather than to a leadership development approach. (p. 137)

Fink (2005) acknowledged the need for public education to learn from the private sector, but emphasized the importance of connecting leadership succession to identification, recruitment, selection, and development of school leaders.

55

Debates around the principal shortages in the United States revealed mixed findings. Although at the beginning of a school year many schools start without a principal, there is no shortage of certified applicants for the position (Wallace Foundation, 2003). Principal shortages have occurred because teachers who carry leadership certificates are not willing to leave their classrooms to assume leadership positions (Professional Standards Commission, 2008). Walker and Kwan (2009) examined the assistant principals' interest in becoming principals and concluded that those assistant principals who were more interested in professional development, were more likely to pursue the principalship. Furthermore, principals' tenure has shortened due to the applicants entering the position later in their careers and leaving it sooner (Gates et al., 2003).

Theoretical inquiry into principal succession. Principal succession is not a new topic in educational research. Although there have been only a few empirical studies found that addressed principal succession and succession planning, the earliest of these studies were published in the beginning of the 1980s, right after *A Nation at Risk* (1983). Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) proposed a model of leader succession in a school setting, and analyzed every component of effective succession plan. Miskel and Cosgrove asserted that frequent school leader changes were disruptive to effective school functioning, and thus, would not result in expected positive learner outcomes for students or the systems in which they are enrolled. Looking back to the 1970s, Miskel and Cosgrove listed environmentally controlled issues, poor performance, and degradation as major reasons for principal dismissal.

Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) hypothesized about the problems related to leader succession in school settings that came to the forefront in the 1980s. They believed that succession leads to different levels of instability in the organization. Miskel and Cosgrove

reported that "the composition of the administrator selection committees and the methods they use relate to the amounts of change that accompany succession events" (p. 100). Other findings asserted that administrators from outside the school system produced more change and instability than those chosen from inside; and succession of superintendents had higher impact than principal succession. Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) further elaborated that the "rates of succession influence the leadership styles of administrators" (p. 100); and concluded that "inside and outside successors possess different orientations toward their careers, professional personnel, educational programs, and needed changes" (p. 100). Miskel and Cosgrove also found that community factors were also important as they limited the influence of new administrators and asserted that the succession of administrators had different levels of impact on the school and its performance.

In the mid-1980s, Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) believed that studying principal succession may enrich the body of knowledge about school administration, but was not enough by itself; they asserted that central office staff must take the lead in planning for effective principal succession. The situation is not much different three decades later; principal succession planning is still at the center of attention, but not all school systems actively plan for the future of the principal positions in the district. Planned continuity is not a reality for many districts across the country; however, research reported that the lack of continuity decreased school effectiveness (Fink & Brayman, 2004; Hargreaves et al., 2003; Hill, 2008).

Principal turnover has been tied to decreased student performance and to the school decline. Rowan and Denk (1984) studied principal succession that they defined as management succession and the impact it had on student achievement. The results showed that there was no

significant change in student achievement during the first year of the new principal's tenure, but there was found a significant negative impact during their second year in the seat.

However, Rowan and Denk (1984) emphasized that changes differed from school to school depending on the socioeconomic context, and were more significant for less affluent schools and districts. Rowan and Denk concluded that, "the increasing accountability of principals for instructional outcomes is overdrawn and unrealistic" (p. 534). Despite such negative reviews of principal accountability for student achievement, this idea gained more popularity in the No Child Left Behind Era, and currently student achievement is arguably the most important criteria in principal evaluation. More recent studies, however, indicated the mediated impact of principals on student achievement and teacher performance (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Based on the review of literature on school leadership, Jacobson and Bezzina (2008) concluded that principals had direct impact on school success, which, in turn, influenced student achievement.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the concept of principal succession was theorized and analyzed by Hart (1991), who published the book *Principal Succession* that remains one of the very few books that discussed leadership succession as a concept in a school setting. Hart placed an emphasis on the impact that school leadership had on student achievement, and highlighted the importance of planned principal succession that she defined as "the process of replacing key officials in organizations" (p. 451).

Hart (1991) asserted that principal succession should be viewed from multidirectional, social viewpoint, and singled out socialization as an important component of principal succession. In turn, socialization in principal succession should be focused on: socialization tactics employed; socialization stages; personal and social contexts of the process; and outcomes

or effects. Following Hart's lead, Hargreaves (2005) analyzed principal succession and based

his succession model on the examples from the business world. Discussing the importance of

studying principal turnover, Hargreaves (2005) emphasized:

> One of the most significant events in the life of a school is a change in its leadership. Yet few things in education succeed less than leadership succession. Failure to care for leadership succession is sometimes a result of manipulation or self-centeredness; but more often it is oversight, neglect, or the pressures of crisis management that are to blame. (p. 163)

Hargreaves (2005) stated that leadership was often mistakenly tied to seniority, and because of

that, the best person for the position may not be appointed. He asserted that succession should

not be viewed as "just a temporary episodic problem in individual schools, but a pervasive crisis

in the system" (p. 164). Hargreaves (2005) emphasized the importance and necessity of planned

continuity as well as inbound, insider, and outbound knowledge. In addition, Hargreaves

criticized the top-down approach in principal succession as it could lead to resistance from the

staff and would not produce desired positive outcomes.

Studies of succession in school settings. As principal succession was conceptualized in

theory, studies emerged that analyzed principal succession in real school settings. These studies

used succession frameworks from the business field or solely focused on examining the

succession policies and practices in certain school systems, states, or countries. This section

provided an overview of the findings from these studies.

Coming from the field of management, Gabarro (1987) suggested that leader succession

involved five main stages: taking hold, immersion, reshaping, consolidation, and refinement.

Gabarro's leader succession framework was adopted by Stine (1998), who wanted to show that

principal succession was similar to corporate leader succession. Stine reported the results of a

single case study on principal succession and followed one principal's experiences on assuming

a school leader position as he was assuming the new role and he prepared the improvement plan

and the strategic plan for the school. Stine (1998, p. 15) concluded that "succession process for principals [was] similar" to the corporate leader succession as analyzed by Gabarro (1987).

Two studies examined the role and effects of succession in a school-reform process and in school restructuring (Davidson & Taylor, 1998, 1999). A case study of a rural elementary school focused on the effects of principal succession on a school reform process. Davidson and Taylor (1998) concluded that the fact of changing a principal was not harmful to the school restructuring process, but the new principal's buy-in was crucial to the success of the restructuring. The second study extended the findings of the original research. Davidson and Taylor (1999) emphasized that teachers should have a voice in choosing their next principal and asserted that strong teacher leadership may mitigate the harmful effects of principal succession.

Griffith (1999) studied relations between school leadership and school configuration that he defined as school climate, structure, and characteristics of student population. Griffith concluded that schools with frequent principal changes and high turnover rates had significantly different organizational configurations than those without principal changes. Griffith reported that schools with principal changes had more new students, lower test scores, and were perceived as less disciplined and less ordered.

Jones and Webber (2001) believed that "principal succession is misunderstood and underutilized as a means of affecting dynamic renewal in school communities" (p. 3). The researchers reported the results of a case study focused on student, parent, and staff perspectives on incoming school leader, asserting that these were the areas that have been traditionally underestimated and overlooked. Jones and Webber concluded that principal succession should not be viewed as a principal-centered event only, but that succession should be regarded as a

60

community-centered event, so the input from staff, students, and parents in choosing a new principal was not neglected.

Macmillan, Meyer, and Northfield (2004) studied the role of trust in the principal succession process that impacted the relations between principals and teachers. A mixed methods research approach was used to examine principal succession and its impact on teachers during a three-year study. Macmillan et al. (2004) acknowledged that the results of the study only started to unveil the concept of trust in principal succession, but they concluded that trust was an important component of succession and was conceptualized as a continuum. Macmillan et al. (2004) asserted:

> We also had indications that principals can become 'stalled' at role or practice levels of trust. Whether this 'stalling' is negative or positive, and how this happened and why needs to be examined further. In some schools and for some principals and teachers, this stage of trust may be seen as desirable. (p. 291)

The study was concluded with calls for more research on the concept of trust and principal succession overall.

White, Cooper, and Brayman (2006) compared principal rotation and succession practices in the United States and Canada by analyzing plans, policies, and procedures that are a part of the system's rotation and succession policies. They defined rotation as change of principals that may be caused by different factors from inside and outside of the system. White et al. described four models of principal succession (see Table 2.2) and provided profiles of succession relevant in the local, national, and international contexts.

Although the three sites that were studied differed in terms of the model of school leaders succession, the White et al. (2006) study offered uniform recommendations of how principal succession may be improved. As specified by White et al., the most important goal is to develop a policy model that will be capable of "encompassing the depth and breadth of the entire

61

principal transfer process, including principal recruitment, induction, interviewing, and ongoing

support" (p. 59). Huber and Pashiardis (2008) examined principal recruitment and selection

practices and emphasized the importance of developing and selecting suitable school leaders able

to deal effectively with social, political, and economical changes affecting schools nowadays.

Table 2.2

Models of Principal Succession

Model	Description
Bureaucratically rotational	Regularly and traditionally occurring changes of school leaders.
Existentially rotational	Is peculiar to a given period of time.
Internal, non-rotational	There is no pressure to rotate; the changes are made internally.
Open market model	Rotation is internal and external, and is done inside and outside the field of education.

(White et al., 2006)

Zimmerman (2007) employed case study methodology to examine principal succession

on the example of four principals. This qualitative study used data from interviews,

observations, field notes, and document review to examine the experiences of newly appointed

school leaders. Zimmerman reported that a cross-case analysis among the principals in the study

revealed four themes central to school leader succession: learning about the requirements of the

new position; establishing relationships in the school and system; initiating change, and gaining

support. Zimmerman concluded that effective succession planning prepared future principals for

leadership positions and also included the support they needed to be effective school leaders.

Reynolds et al. (2008) examined gender succession practices and focused on the appointment of females as secondary school principals in 10 urban and rural school districts in Canada. The importance of succession planning was acknowledged: "The need for effective leadership rotation/succession strategies has become more apparent because of the loss of experienced leaders to retirement in many school districts and the growing crisis in such districts for the recruitment and training of new leaders" (Reynolds et al., 2008, p. 36). The interview data from 33 participants were analyzed and the findings presented two major themes:

1. The needs of the system are placed above the needs of the individual leader, whether male or female; and,

2. When considering rotation/succession, fit was the most important factor (however, gender balance was sought after).

Reynolds et al. (2008) asserted, "Despite repeated claims by our participants that gender was not a factor in decision making, we have described how technical, social-regulative, and extra-organizational rules can operate to affect the participation of men and women as secondary principals across Canada" (p. 49). The study concluded with an implication to encourage more women to consider middle school principalship as a viable career.

The appeals and issues of the elementary school principalship were examined by Simkins, Close, and Smith (2009). Highlighting the need for effective principal succession planning due to the recently reported shortages, Simkins et al. (2009) suggested work-shadowing as an important, yet under-researched aspect of school leadership. This study involved 20 participating teachers who shadowed the principals and 5 successful principals who were shadowed. The findings of this qualitative study revealed that work-shadowing was perceived as an effective way to learn about the roles, responsibilities, and challenges of a principal. In the

process of the study, different models of shadowing emerged: pure shadowing; shadowing plus in-depth discussion; understanding the school (broad shadowing); and investigating a personal issue (narrow focus shadowing). Simkins et al. (2009) reported the success of this initiative and suggested preplanning between teachers and principals as an effective way to set the process.

Meyer, Macmillan, and Northfield (2009) addressed another aspect of principal succession—its impact on teacher morale that was defined as a "construct that describes the relative mental/emotional valence of positive or negative energy of an individual or of a group of individuals (as in a school staff). It is the result of the perceptions and interpretations of contextually influenced experiences" (Meyer et al., 2009, p. 173). The study was framed as an in-depth case study of two newly appointed secondary school principals in Canada. Meyer et al. asserted that principal succession was affected by several factors (see Table 2.3). Meyer et al. (2009) concluded that teacher morale was a critical factor that influenced "the ability of the new principal to carry out their responsibilities and to initiate change" (p. 184).

Table 2.3

Factors Affecting Principal Succession

Factor	Description
Role of informal leaders	Teacher leaders were critical in maintaining morale and stability in the school.
Experience levels of the staff	Frequent principal changes had more effect on the morale of the new teachers, not veteran teachers.
Marginalization of the principalship	Teachers excluded a principal from their work.

(Meyer et al., 2009)

Principal succession, recruitment, selection, and retention of school leaders have been at the forefront of researchers' attention worldwide; however, there was very little research done that detailed succession in PreK-12 education (Bengtson, 2010; Zepeda et al., 2009). Fink and Brayman (2004) addressed the issues of change in the responsibilities related to succession planning of principals in Canada. They asserted that even though "it is premature to declare a leadership crisis in education, it is not too early to call on policy makers to attend to the growing need for succession planning at all levels in education" (Fink & Brayman, 2004, p. 431).

Fink and Brayman (2004) studied literature on leadership succession from education and business and summarized their findings in five major themes:

1. "Succession planning should become a major policy issue in school jurisdictions" (p. 444);

2. "Succession plans must link leadership recruitment, preparation, selection, assignment, induction and on-going development in a coherent future-oriented way" (p. 445);

3. "Regularly scheduled principal rotation in turbulent times appears to create more problems than it solves" (p. 445);

4. "School jurisdictions will need to think in terms of the abilities and backgrounds of leadership teams rather than putting together senior management teams in a piecemeal fashion" (p. 446); and,

5. "Top down reforms tend to undermine the ability of principals to engage with staff and develop the shared sense of meaning that is necessary to sustain change and promote deep learning or students" (Fink & Brayman, 2004, p. 446).

The issues related to principal succession have also been examined in Australian educational research. Cranston, Tromans, and Reugebrink (2004) studied deputy principals (assistant principals) as the traditional way to fill vacant school leadership positions in Australia. The findings were similar to those from the US studies; deputy (assistant) principals reported increased pressure on the job, decreased satisfaction from the work they do, gaps between real and ideal job expectations, and increased hours of work. Cranston et al. (2004) concluded that deputy principals have been traditionally thought of as natural successors of principals, but in the light of reported changes of the job as well as increased accountability, not many deputy principals were willing to assume principal positions, which, in turn, could potentially lead to principal shortages. Thus, effective succession planning was needed to make sure that no school was left without a principal in the future.

Further, the issue of principal shortages in Australia was addressed by Barty, Thomson, Blackmore, and Sachs (2005), who reported the decrease in number of applicants for leadership positions, increased work and responsibilities of principals, and new issues that arose in education and were tied to local educational policies. Barty et al. asserted that currently in Australia, "there is both declining interest in principalship and also a strong probability that the situation will get worse, as younger teachers show low interest in school administration" (Barty et al., 2005, p. 2). Barty et al. (2005) highlighted four major issues in principal shortage in Australia (see Table 2.4). However, Barty et al. (2005) cautioned that these findings may not be generalized, as they may differ based on the size of the school or its location. Barty et al. (2005) noted that changes have been occurring in the principal's job over the last 20 years. Among the important changes, the authors emphasized expanded responsibilities, heightened pressure from accountability movement and parents, social and generational changes, as well as changes in

educational politics. Barty et al. (2005) concluded on a positive note, "there is no uniform

shortage of principals at present, but rather there is a mosaic of issues which attract and put off

potential applicants" (p. 14).

Table 2.4

Major Issues in Principal Shortages in Australia

Issue	Description
Location	In distant, remote places it is more difficult to get qualified candidates to fill in school leadership positions
Size of school	Very large and very small schools are less appealing options for applicants
"Secret issues"	In some cases applicants are less willing to apply knowing what is happening inside the system.
Local politics	Local politics getting in the way of effective principal selection process

(Barty et al., 2005)

Clayton-Jones et al. (1993) presented a study that focused on the importance of

performance appraisal for school leaders as reported by Australian principals. They asserted that

performance appraisal might contribute to increased student achievement, more effective

principal professional development, individual career planning, accountability, and could act as a

trade off for salary increase. The results of the study supported the hypothesis of researchers that

performance appraisal could be an effective method, but not to the degree they expected.

Clayton-Jones et al. summarized that this approach could be used as a part of principal

succession planning, but one should be careful while implementing it, because there was a

danger of misinterpretation and misjudgment.

Brooking (2003) studied elementary school principals in New Zealand and speculated

about the possible future directions. Brooking emphasized the role of the school board in

principal selection as well as the importance of succession process and asserted that men were

more likely to be promoted to leadership positions than women. Brooking (2003) stated that school leadership system in New Zealand was strictly regulated by the board of trustees, and thus, female applicants were less likely to assume the leadership position than the male applicants with the same credentials. However, Brooking concluded that this situation has been changing, and although male applicants were still preferred, the female ones would be appointed if they had higher credentials and seemed more suitable for the job requirements.

Barriers to successful principal succession were tied to changes in principal roles and responsibilities (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Griffith, 1999; Shumate et al., 2005; Whitaker, 2003; Winter et al., 2002), decreased attractiveness to the principal job (Fink, 2011; Roza, 2003; Shumate et al., 2005), and the search for a certain type of candidates (Roza, 2003). Accountability-related requirements (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) and external demands (Hargreaves et al., 2003) have made the principal position less appealing for possible applicants, thus resulting in principal shortages.

Principal succession is a human resources issue that is "not just an individual employee issue; it also focuses on integrating human resources into the organization's strategy. It becomes part of the visionary process. Strategic planning, budgeting, and human resource planning are linked together" (Pynes, 2004, p. 390). Succession planning should address replacement management, workforce planning, talent management, and human capital management (Rothwell, 2005). Only if all these components are present, effective succession occurs.

Methodological analysis of recent studies on principal succession. Principal succession is not a well-analyzed area of school administration; therefore, the articles used in this analysis were published over the last three decades in various researcher and practitioner journals. The journals were not selected randomly; several online databases (i.e., EBSCO,

ERIC, JSTOR) were cross-searched for scholarly articles about principal succession. There were 30 articles found on the topic; all of them were used in this methodological analysis. Systematic content analysis revealed that qualitative (10 studies) and quantitative (9 studies) methodologies were equally used in studying principal succession. Two studies employed mixed methods. Finally, there were two articles presenting literature review on the topic, while seven articles were characterized as conceptual papers.

The literature reviews presented the overview of the previously published studies on principal succession in the United States, Europe, Oceania, Africa, and Asia. Increasing demands of the principal position worldwide and issues related to principal recruitment and retention (Whitaker, 2003) and overview of principal succession and its components (Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985) were analyzed based on previously published empirical studies. Conceptual papers presented ideas of the authors about the ways to improve principal succession in schools and were drawn not only from educational literature, but also from economics, sociology, and business. Rothwell (2005) presented an overview of principal succession and suggested that effective succession planning was a solution to shortages in workforce. Rynes and Barber (1990) suggested an interdisciplinary model of attracting applicants based on the literature from economics, human resource management, organizational behavior, and sociology. Finally, Hart (1991) suggested a synthesis of traditional succession and socialization frameworks as an effective model of leader succession in a school setting.

Two mixed methods articles in the sample were framed within the epistemology of constructionism and combined the theoretical perspectives of post-positivism and interpretivism at the stages of data collection and data analysis. Pynes (2004) examined documents from state public agencies to extract major issues in human resource management. This mixed methods

69

study employed document analysis and quantitative projection as research methods and, based on the findings, suggested strategies to improve leader succession and human resource planning. Barty, Thompson, Blackmore, and Sachs (2005) studied the declining supply of principals in Australia. Initially, the authors compared the numerical data on principal shortages over the last three decades, and followed with interpretative analysis of qualitative data from interviews and observations. Barty et al. (2005) concluded that succession planning should start early and should be well-planned and systematic.

The quantitative studies in the sample adopted objectivism as epistemology and post-positivism as a theoretical framework. Out of nine studies, one employed experimental research as methodology, while eight were survey studies. Shumate, Munoz, and Winter (2005) presented the experimental design quantitative study that evaluated the potential of teacher-leaders in Kentucky for administrative career. The study was based on three independent variables (assistant principal job attributes, teacher-leader type, and current or past teaching assignment) and used the data collected from a five-point scale survey.

Eight quantitative studies were described as survey research. The data for these studies were collected by validated Likert or Likert-like surveys from random or representative sample. One study (Brooking, 2003) used a national sample of New Zealand's boards of trustees, while seven studies had either regional or state samples. Perception survey was the most common research method for this sample of articles (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Cooley & Shen, 2000; Griffith, 1999; Smith, Guarino, Strom, & Reed, 2003). The data from surveys were analyzed by ANOVA or MANOVA statistical tests. The authors reported the significance and measures and provided the implications for policy and practice.

Ten qualitative studies in the sample were framed within assumptions of epistemology of constructionism and theoretical perspective of interpretivism. One article presented interpretative thematic study (Thody, Papanaoum, Johansson, & Pashiardis, 2007), while nine articles reported the results of a single or multiple case studies. The data for all qualitative studies were collected by different methods; the most common were individual and focus group interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Findings of the analysis of research designs of articles on principal succession revealed almost equal amount of qualitative (10), quantitative (9), and theoretical (9) studies. There was no significant variation in research design and methods in these groups of articles. The majority of qualitative articles were interpretative case studies; most of quantitative articles presented post-positivist survey research. From the studies analyzed for the purposes of this dissertation, there were no ethnographic, phenomenological, or grounded theory studies on principal succession.

The overview of different educational journals showed that articles on principal succession were quite scarce. Although the search was not limited to major journals or to the recent years, there were only 30 articles found that studied principal succession. Studies on principal professional learning were more numerous and employed different theoretical perspectives, research designs, and methods. However, there were no studies found that looked at the role of professional learning in principal succession and this study attempted to help fill the gap by further exploring principal succession and analyzing the strategic role of professional learning in school leader succession.

Principal succession is complicated and important, yet not well-researched topic. Although the inquiries into the topic of school leader succession were charted in the 1980s, the

topic remained little researched three decades later. Early models of principal succession incorporated leader succession practices from the business sector, yet studies of succession in school setting indicated that more research was needed to examine this complex phenomenon. The literature review revealed studies that examined issues related to principal succession in the United States and abroad, principal shortages, and barriers to effective principal succession. There was a general agreement among the authors that more research was needed to explore this important area (Fink & Brayman, 2004; Hart, 1991; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). One area that needs to be closer examined is the role of professional learning in principal succession. The following section presents the links between professional learning and succession of school leaders as explored in the existing studies on principal succession.

Connecting Principal Succession and Professional Learning

Conventional wisdom holds that professional learning is an essential component of effective succession planning, incorporated in preparing future leaders and supporting current principals. Professional development should be carefully planned to increase retention and manage turnover of school leaders. Because professional learning is an important component of principal preparation, induction, and professional growth, it is integral to principal succession and should be regarded as a necessary component of a school leader succession plan.

To date, studies on principal succession have not focused on the role of professional development in this process. Rather, professional development was mentioned as one of the components for principal succession. Professional learning was also described as important to sustaining the pipeline of prospective leaders. Pounder and Crow (2005) asserted that districts, professional associations, and "academies and universities can cooperate in providing professional development for principals and assistant principals and for larger leadership teams.

72

This professional development can focus on team building, group dynamics, and other skills that facilitate shared instructional leadership responsibility" (p. 56). Leader succession planning would help districts to guide the development of future administrators and would include professional development to avoid premature promotions (Johnson, 2001; Macmillan, 1996).

Some studies positioned principal professional learning and succession as two different processes. In a study of secondary principals in Ontario, Macmillan (2000) warned against using principal rotation as a succession approach. Macmillan asserted, "When leadership succession is regular and routinized, teachers are likely to build resilient cultures which inoculate them against the effects of succession" (p. 68). Macmillan concluded that rotation may be useful in principal professional development, but did not help principal succession.

In a study of the deputy principals, Cranston et al. (2004) summarized that desired areas of professional development for emerging leaders included financial management, leadership skills, and managerial skills, while

> Desirable strategies for professional development identified by respondents included acting in the roles of principal, work shadowing, accessing opportunities to share best practice, and mentoring. Induction programs for deputies moving into the position for the first time were identified as desirable by a small number of respondents. (Cranston et al., 2004, p. 238)

Thus, professional development was viewed as necessary to prepare future leaders for school leadership positions.

The relation of professional learning to principal succession also emerged in the international studies on school leader succession. In the study of declining supply of principals in Australia, Barty et al. (2005) noted that professional development helped to alleviate gender issues around principal succession process. Clayton-Jones et al (1993) reported a study on principal appraisal and emphasized that the appraisal was perceived as strongly linked to

73

professional development for school leaders, "On average, the principals indicated that they saw the performance appraisal process fostering a high level of professional development and a lower level of conformity" (Clayton-Jones, et al., 1993, p. 127).

While many authors recognized professional development merely as one of the components of the principal succession process, others emphasized it as an integral component of it. Hart (1991) asserted,

> A long-range succession strategy also aims to develop a district's human resources through the professional development of principals. Both school and principal growth are admirable goals of succession, as schools in a district will rely in the future on the leadership of talented, skilled, and knowledgeable principals who have benefited from each succession experience. (p. 468)

Hart (1991, p. 451) believed that "leaders are shaped in their organizations," and viewed principal socialization and professional development as important components of successful principal development and growth. Induction and continuous professional learning were described as key factors in principal socialization (Barnett, 2003; McCarthy, 1999).

Normore (2004a) also presented findings on the exploratory cross-case study that compared leadership succession planning in two school districts in Ontario. The data revealed that professional development was tied to principal succession, induction, and socialization. Normore (2004a) summarized:

> A difference existed in the structure of the administration preparation program in the districts. District A had a structured preparation program that included training, professional development, and a process for developing the professional growth portfolio. One team of staff development officers and practicing administrators facilitated and coordinated all activities in a structured three month course format every fall and spring. District B had a loosely structured administration preparation program in place. No particular course was developed where candidates were required to meet regularly. Rather, project teams comprised of practicing school administrators worked in conjunction with one another and were responsible for training, professional development activities, and developing professional growth portfolios. (para. 54)

Normore (2004a) concluded that more research was needed to explore principal succession and suggested that districts considered principal succession as part of the induction process and provided them with adequate professional development to make them used to their new roles and responsibilities. The findings of this study suggest that principal succession should be analyzed in its relation to professional learning of school leaders.

Chapter Summary

There has been a lot of research done on topics related to the principalship over the last three decades. With increased calls for accountability, principals moved from being building managers to instructional leaders that indirectly impact student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). The changes in principal's responsibilities (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Niesche, 2010) resulted in thinning of the applicant pool and decreased desirability to become a school leader (Walker & Kwan, 2009).

As the principal's position increased in complexity and demands (Crow, 2006; Sorenson, 2005), traditional principal preparation programs were found inefficient in preparing good leaders (Miller, Devin, & Shoop, 2007; Normore, 2010). Although new practices in principal preparation have been suggested (Lauder, 2000; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006), novice principals assumed the principalships feeling ill-prepared (Walker & Qian, 2006; Wildy & Clarke, 2008).

Given the changes of the position and the limitations of principal preparation, it is hardly surprising that professional development was sought to fill in the gaps of inadequate principal preparation. Research on principal professional learning examined major characteristics of effective professional development (Cardno, 2005; Haar, 2004); goals and models of professional development (Assor & Oplatka, 2003; Boon, 1998; Eller, 2010); continuous

professional learning (Haar, 2004; Sorenson, 2005); and applications of adult learning theory to professional development of school leaders (Knowles, 1992; Zepeda, 2008).

Another aspect of the principalship, principal succession, has been less examined. Early studies on principal professional development were modeled after business organizations (Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985). With the exception of the seminal piece on succession (Hart, 1991), the majority of principal succession research has been conducted in the last decade by the same researchers (Fink, 2005, 2010, 2011; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Only several recent studies on principal succession were practical, not theoretical in nature (Bengtson, 2010; Griffith, 1999; White, Cooper, & Brayman, 2006).

Due to the scarcity of research on principal succession overall, it is not surprising that only a few studies were found that connected these two aspects of the principalship. While professional development was describes as closely connected to principal succession (Normore, 2004a), an important part of principal succession (Pounder & Crow, 2005), or merely one of the components of the succession process (Hart, 1991), no study was found that explicitly examined the role of professional learning in principal succession.

This study aimed to fill this gap in research literature on the topic by examining how professional learning related to principal succession. Three major aspects of this topic were targeted: professional development provided for current administrators; professional learning as an instrument of preparing prospective school leaders; and the relationship between professional learning and principal succession. The next chapter presents the research design and the methodology of the study.

76

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The theory and research about the principalship underscored that the position of a school principal has undergone significant changes over the last three decades (Behar-Horenstein, 1995; Catano & Stronge, 2006; Lyons, 1999; Stronge, 1993; Whitaker, 2003). The shift in the principalship began most notably with *A Nation at Risk* report of 1983 and was characterized as a transition from a manager responsible for buildings to an instructional leader accountable for student achievement (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cascadden, 1998; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Lyons, 1999; Normore, 2004a). Increased responsibilities along with the retirement of baby-boomers and inadequate preparation for principalship resulted in the principal shortages, thinning of the applicant pool, and increased principal turnover.

Given that there is a gap in the literature about principal succession, this study focused on a single aspect of this phenomenon—the connection between professional learning and principal succession. This study examined principal professional learning and succession in two public school systems in the state of Georgia, focusing on the professional development provided for current and aspiring leaders and examining the relationship between principal professional learning and succession. This chapter explains the research design and methods of the study.

This study focused on the analysis of principal succession and professional learning in two public school districts in Georgia. To explore the connections between the phenomena of principal succession and professional learning, this study analyzed the perspectives of 18 school

leaders from 2 public school systems. Two different interview protocols (one on principal

professional development and one on succession) were used to gather data from principals,

superintendents, and central office personnel. The purpose of this study was to explore the

connections between principal succession and professional learning through the analysis of

current practices in the identification, support, and retention of school leaders.

The researcher sought to understand participants' experiences of and perspectives about

principal succession and professional learning for current and aspiring leaders. This study

situated professional learning in planning for principal succession. Three major aspects of this

topic were targeted: professional learning as a support for current administrators; professional

learning as an instrument of preparing prospective school leaders; and the relationship between

professional learning and principal succession. The primary goals of this study were three-fold:

- To situate professional learning in the context of principal succession;

- To analyze the use of professional learning in supporting current principals and
  growing future leaders; and,

- To examine the relationship between professional learning and principal succession.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following overall research questions:

1. How do current leader identification, development, support, and retention practices
   foster principal professional growth and build leadership pipeline?

2. How do the district leaders describe an "effective" principal in conversations on
   leader professional development and succession planning?

3. In the context of participating districts and school leaders, what is the relationship
   between principal succession and professional learning?

For the purposes of this study, 'school leaders' were defined broadly to include all building and central office leaders who participated in the study.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of this study drew from the theories about management succession (Rowan & Denk, 1984), principal succession (Hart, 1991), principal succession based on business models of leadership succession (Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003), and principal turnover (Jones & Webber, 2001). Among the others, this study was informed by the following concepts from principal professional learning theories: goals of professional development (Assor & Oplatka, 2003), mission of professional development programs (Peterson, 2002), well-planned nature of effective professional learning for school leaders (Evans & Mohr, 1999), and continuous nature of effective principal professional learning (Engelking, 2008; Metais, 1997; Sorenson, 2005).

This study was framed within the interpretative qualitative research paradigm based on the assumption that "the descriptions of human actions are based on social meanings, people living together interpret the meanings of each other and these meanings change through social intercourse" (Bassey, 1999, p. 43). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) stated:

> Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 2)

Interpretative researchers collect and analyze verbal data that "are usually richer, in a language sense, than positivist data and, perhaps because of this quality, the methodology of the interpretative researchers is described as 'qualitative'" (Bassey, 1999, p. 43, emphasis in the original). The design of the study was framed within the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology.

79

The conceptual framework of the study is graphically presented in Figure 3.1.

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                        │  Research   │
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        │Symbolic Interactionism│  │   Ethnomethodology    │
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        │ Analytic Methods │  │  │    Analytic      │
        │                  │  │  │    Method        │
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        │  (interviews)    │ ┌──────┐  │ Membership  │
        │                  │ │Research│ │Categorization│
        │ Content Analysis │ │Methods │ │  Analysis   │
        │(documents/artifacts)│ │      │ │            │
        └──────────────────┘ │Interviews│ └───────────┘
                             │Documents │
                             │Observations│
                             └──────┘
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Figure 3.1. Conceptual Framework

Epistemology

The epistemology, or a "theory of knowledge" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3), explains what is the nature and status of knowledge (Silverman, 2005). The epistemology of this study was constructionism based on the belief that "there is no meaning without a mind," and people construct meaning of the same phenomenon in a different way (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8-9). Costructionism is the "view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42).

The constructionist epistemology allowed the researcher to study the subjective views of the participants about principal professional learning and its relationship to leader succession. Professional learning and succession were considered to be socially constructed phenomena based on school leaders' interpretations of reality in their school systems. The epistemology of the study was further reflected in the theoretical perspectives.

Theoretical Perspectives

The study was framed by two theoretical perspectives—symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology—that guided the selection of analytic methods.

Symbolic interactionism. As a theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism has been widely used in educational research (LeCompte & Preissle, 1992) and was included in the overall design of this study for it allowed the researcher to focus on the subjective perceptions of human behaviors and social processes. Symbolic interactionism originated from the work of George Herbert Mead and was popularized by Herbert Blumer (Wood, 1992). Blumer (1969) asserted that

human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their 'response' is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behavior. (Blumer, 1969, p. 180)

This study focused on examining the current school leaders' perceptions and experiences of professional development and succession and was based on interpreting participants' accounts of their experiences with and their beliefs about these phenomena.

Unlike quantitative paradigms, symbolic interactionism "viewed reality as a social construction; because it questioned conventional "scientific" notions of the nature of reality" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1992, p. 850). Situating symbolic interactionism as a theory and method, Wood (1992) summarized the main principles of the method as suggested by Blumer in the 1960s:

(1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (2) this attribution of meaning to objects through symbols is a continuous *process,* and (3) meaning attribution is a product of social interaction in human society. The symbols are signs, language, gestures, or anything that conveys meaning, and the meaning is *constructed* in social interaction. (p. 338, emphasis in the original)

This study examined how school leaders socially constructed meanings of principal professional development and succession; spoken language (interviews) served as a source of verbal symbols.

Symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective strengthened this study. Rooted in the understanding of social interaction and in the explorations of meanings developed by the person (self) impacted by others (society, social settings, social order, etc.), symbolic interactionism supported the exploration of the participants' perceptions and interpretations of reality (in this case, participants' accounts of professional learning and succession), to analyze the meanings that participants attributed to professional learning and succession that they

82

experienced, witnessed, and discussed in their schools and in the system overall. Symbolic

interactionism viewed a school leader as an active participant who "interacts, thinks, defines,

applies his or her past, and makes decisions in the present based on factors in the immediate

situation" (Charon, 2004, p. 29). Crotty (1998) emphasized that the world of symbolic

interactionism was the "world of intersubjectivity, interaction, community and communication,

in and out of which we come to be persons and to live as persons" (p. 63). The meanings that the

participants developed through their interactions and communication within a socially ordered

institutional space of a school district were the focus of the analysis in this study.

As suggested by its name, symbolic interactionism focuses on the construction of

meaning in human interactions that occur through verbal symbols. Wood (1992) asserted, "the

most important [symbols] are verbal, as expressed in language. The internalization of symbols

and meaning patterns and stimulations of thought through language increases the human being's

powers of reflexivity" (p. 342). The interaction was conceptualized on two levels: first, the

interview was regarded as an interaction between the participants and the researcher; second, it

was assumed that the participants communicated the themes and meanings that they have

developed through their interaction with other leaders and teachers within their school systems.

Because symbolic interactionism focused on interactions to better understand the

individuals (Charon, 2004), it assisted the researcher in understanding and interpreting the

participants' responses to answer the research questions of the study. Wood (1992) posited

> Because social interaction is constructed by the people engaged in it, one should try to
> see it from their point of view and appreciate how they interpret the indications given to
> them by others and the meanings they assign to them and how they construct their own
> action. (pp. 353-354)

The data for the study were collected predominantly by interviews since interview data were

commonly used for analysis in studies employing symbolic interactionism as a framework

(Denzin, 1992; Rock, 2001). Prasad (2005) stated, "Often, interviews in this tradition can be relatively open-ended, giving the respondents considerable control of the direction of the interview itself" (Prasad, 2005, p. 25). Through the analysis of the interview data, this study focused on the examination of the participants' interpretations of phenomena of principal succession and professional learning and the meanings they assigned to these processes.

Another framework guiding this study, ethnomethodology, allowed the researcher to look at how participants made sense of the interview topics (i.e., professional learning and succession). Ethnomethodology also focused on the analysis of human interactions in search of meaning. However, the focus of analysis shifted from exploring the participants' perceptions and interpretations of reality to the participants' sense-making in acts of description.

Ethnomethodology. Ethnomethodology studies everyday interactions with an emphasis on sense-making process (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Arminen (2005) defined four grounding principles of ethnomethodology:

A. The meaning of a social phenomenon is equivalent to methodic procedures through which participants sustain the sense of a given phenomenon.
B. Language use and social actions are indexical, i.e., their understanding is bound to the context of their achievement.
C. The social order is the participants' methodic achievement.
D. Rules and regularities are resources for interpretations and guide the participants as sources of understanding. (p. 11)

As an in-depth analysis of mundane conversation and people's meaning making, ethnomethodology uses conversation analysis (CA) and membership categorization analysis (MCA) to explore the meaning-making process. Although both approaches were introduced at the same time (1960s), they have distinct differences. Housley and Fitzgerald (2002) explained:

The development of CA and MCA as two distinct ethnomethodological analytical approaches to language activities has been documented earlier. As previously discussed, a frequent perception is to regard conversation analysis as concerned with the *sequential organization of conversation* whilst categorization analysis is seen to be concerned with

84

the methods of *categorization and the display of categories and their assorted predicates* in both naturally occurring talk and textual formations. (p. 71, emphasis in the original)

Thus, the main difference between CA and MCA is the focus of analysis on sequential organization (CA) of talk-interaction or how descriptions are accomplished (MCA) of the speech.

Sack's initial conception of MCA. The origins of MCA lay in lectures on conversation by Harvey Sacks. Sacks (1995) coined the term 'membership category' to describe person's belonging to some group of which a specific membership "feature" is made relevant by speakers (p. 590). For example, a membership category "principal" is relevant to education, teaching, school building, etc. In the acts of description, people employ different categories and ascribe individuals to a membership in different categories (i.e., gender, race, age group, profession, etc.). Sacks noted that the same word can belong to several membership categories depending on the context and its use in the conversation; thus, the meaning of any given word can only be understood in context. From the concept of membership categories, Sacks introduced a term, *membership categorization device,* which he defined as "collections of categories for referring to persons, with some rules of application" (p. 238). The example of membership categorization devices include family, country, etc. Sacks was interested in how people did describing and how they used membership categories to get social actions done (i.e., to compliment somebody, to tell a joke, etc.). This study relied on MCA to explore the categories used by the school leaders to describe their career paths in research interviews.

Baker (2000) asserted that members of populations routinely use MCA to understand one another's actions and utterances. Baker claimed that "Membership categorization work is arguably central to all description … Membership categorization analysis is not just what the formal analyst does. It is done in all sites or reading, writing, hearing and speaking" (p. 103).

Furthermore, MCA allows members of the society to examine "seen but unnoticed" feature of the everyday life (Garfinkel, 1999, p. 36). As an approach to analysis of data, MCA was not used much before, but has been increasingly used to analyzed conversations and interview data (Baker, 2000).

Overall, ethnomethodological methods allow the researcher to analyze the conversation as a type of institutional organization (Heritage, 1997). This application of the ethnomethodological methods in this study relied heavily on the fifth component, the lexical choice, because the study analyzed the participants' responses and was guided by the belief that MCA is "providing a componential framework for language use" (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 67).

Ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. In the process of the literature review on principal professional development and succession, there were no studies found that combined ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism into one theoretical framework. However, there are multiple similarities between them to combine successfully these frameworks on the data analysis and interpretation stage.

Both symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology originated in the 20th century as alternatives to the scientific, positivist approaches to conducting research. Consequently, both frameworks gained wider recognition and were further developed in the 1960s. Symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology supported a contextual judgment of rationality (as opposed to widely-accepted scientific rationality) that may be explained as follows: "Whether some action or pattern of activity is judged rationale is decided by reference to the particular conditions within which it is undertaken rather than to some abstract, general (scientific) standard" (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1998, p. 125).

The idea of combining these two frameworks is not a new one. In fact, Denzin (1970) suggested a synthesis between ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. Furthermore, the idea of complete synthesis between these frameworks was later refuted (Gallant & Kleinman, 1983). More recent theoretical inquiries, however, suggest that symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology are congruent and can be combined in one study. Maynard and Clayman (2003) asserted that symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology are compatible because they are both concerned with the use of language and symbols and strive "to advance our knowledge of the inner workings of social life as it is lived. Both enterprises suggest that there is a self-generating order in the behavioral concreteness of everyday life" (p. 195). Similarly, Riessman (2008) forwards that symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology "share interest in how social reality is constructed through interaction … [and] what we as members of a culture take to be "true" … [therefore both frameworks believe that] the process of reality construction can be systematically studied" (p. 106).

Symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology reject the 'a priori' theory in favor of contextual understanding and defy generalized statements that may not be applicable or relevant to certain situations. Both frameworks were originally developed within the field of sociology and were later adopted by other fields; educational research being one of them. Symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology share certain similarities but also have distinct differences. Cuff, Sharrock, and Francis (1998) reflected:

> On the face of it, ethnomethodology seems to be similar to symbolic interactionism. After all, symbolic interactionism shows much concern with the definition of the situation […]. Symbolic interactionism treats the definition of the situation as an interactional matter, emphasizing the way definitions – shared meanings – are worked out between people interacting together in a certain setting. Garfinkel's ethnomethodology certainly accepts the focus on the interactional matters, but its own programme is to treat them as methodical. The very label 'ethno-method-ology' can be simply translated as 'the study of the methods in use amongst members of the society', or more fully as 'the study of the

methods for sense making and fact finding in use amongst members of the society'. (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1998, p. 162)

By combining symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, this study explored principal professional learning and succession by examining the participants' beliefs about and experiences of these phenomena (symbolic interactionism) and the participants' sense-making in the process of talking about these phenomena during the interviews (ethnomethodology). The epistemology and theoretical framework were reflected in the type of research design and research methods selected for the purposes of this study.

Research Design

This qualitative study was framed within the research design of a case study (Creswell, 1998). The study was situated in the context of two school systems in Georgia. Case study was defined as a type of inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13); explores a bounded system "through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61); examines the case to find the answers to research question(s); and "seeks a range of different kinds of evidence, evidence which is there in the case setting, and which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers to the research questions" (Gillham, 2000, pp. 1-2). This was an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2010) because the researcher was genuinely interested in learning about principal professional learning and succession in two Georgia school districts.

Major components of a case study design were included in developing this study (Yin, 2003). Research questions were developed to conform to case study requirements. Yin (2003) stated that "'how' and 'why' questions are more *explanatory* and likely to lead to the use of case studies, histories, and experiments as the preferred research strategies" (p. 6, emphasis in the original). Study propositions were made based on the initial literature review. Principal

88

professional learning and succession were defined as the major units of analysis. The cases were bound by data collection time and geographic location of the research sites (in Georgia). Finally, the themes and constructs were linked to propositions and interpreted based on the established criteria.

The case study was selected as a type of qualitative design to "achieve both more complex and fuller explanations of phenomena" (de Vaus, 2001, p. 221). Following the classification of de Vaus (2001), this study represented a descriptive multiple case study design developed with theory building purposes based on two embedded units of analysis (professional learning and succession). The design was an intrinsic case study with an emphasis "placed on describing the particulars of the case rather than making generalizations" (Springer, 2010, p. 406). Additionally, this multiple case study featured a retrospective design (de Vaus, 2001), due to the data used for the analysis—the data were collected over a period of six months and did not track changes in professional development and succession practices in the school system over time.

Because "the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27), a case and a unit of analysis were identified. A case in this study was an institution, a school system; two units of analysis included professional learning and succession. Thus, there were two single cases followed by the cross-case analysis conducted to compare the findings across the participating systems to find commonalities and differences between their approaches to integrating professional learning in principal succession.

The qualitative design for this study was an exploratory embedded single-case study (Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2003). The exploratory nature of this study is reflected in its goals to investigate principal professional development and succession; the case study is embedded

because it involved two units of analysis. The type of research design for this study is graphically presented in Figure 3.2.

Stake (2010) asserted that for cross-case analysis, individual cases should have similar aspects. In this study, both cases focused on the same setting (school systems in Georgia), had the same participants (i.e., superintendents, central office personnel, and principals), and all participants were interviewed twice following the same interview protocols.
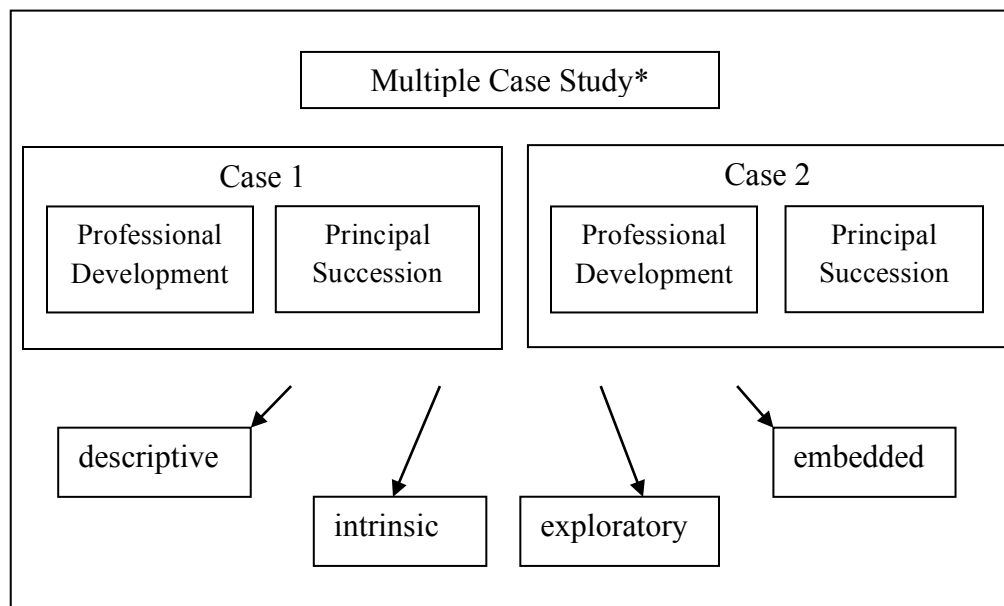
Figure 3.2. Case Study Design

[*Modeled after Yin's (2003) Basic Types of designs for Case Studies, p. 40]

Research Methods

As a research strategy, case study served as an all-encompassing method that predefined the study design, data collection techniques, and data analysis approaches. Following the data collection, the findings were framed to answer subtopical questions guiding the study (Creswell, 1998). The presentation of the findings started with the description of the case, followed with

the themes that emerged from thematic analysis and categories that resulted from membership

categorization analysis. The findings from these two methods were compared and contrasted to

examine the connections between principal professional learning and succession in a cross-case

analysis. Finally, cross-case analysis compared and contrasted the findings from different cases.

Since there is no single data source that can suffice the requirements of a case study

design (Gillham, 2000; Hakim, 2000; Yin, 2003), this study relied on several sources of data:

interviews, document review (artifacts), and observational data (captured in the fill-in notes

during the interviews by the second researcher who accompanied the lead interviewer to every

interview). The observational data from fill-in documents were used as "a *supplementary*

technique to give the illustrative dimension" (Gilham, 2000, p. 49, emphasis in the original).

The use of data generated by different methods is summarized in Table 3.1, where X denotes a

major source of data, while x stands for supplemental data.

Table 3.1

Research Methods

	Key Research Questions		
Method	*Programs, practices, and activities*	*Participants' descriptions of an "effective" principal*	*Relationships between professional development and succession*
Interviews	X	X	X
Observations	x	x	x
Documents	X	X	x

Rationale for Using Qualitative Methods

The choice of qualitative methods for this study was reflected in the research questions and aligned with the purpose of the study: to examine connection between professional learning and principal succession in selected school system in the state of Georgia. The study reflected special characteristics of qualitative inquiry (Stake, 2010): it was interpretive; experiential (empirical and field oriented); situational (oriented to the context of the school districts in the study); and personalistic (based on analyzing individual perceptions).

Gillham (2000) asserted that "[q]ualitative methods focus primarily on the kind of evidence (what people tell you, what they do) that will enable you to understand the meaning of what is going on" (p. 10). Because the researcher wanted to understand, construct, and interpret the meaning of principal professional development and its role in principal succession planning, qualitative methods were employed.

Qualitative methods allowed the researcher to examine situations where little is known about the topic, the issues, and the key players (Gillham, 2000). Because there was a gap in the literature on principal succession planning in general and on the role of professional learning in principal succession in particular, qualitative methods may inform this field of research via analysis and interpretation of professional learning for principals and the role it plays in principal succession planning as expressed by principals and central office personnel who participated in this study. Qualitative methods also assisted with developing a theory about a little-understood topic in education—principal succession. The data from in-depth qualitative interviews supplemented with observational data and field notes provided core data. Qualitative methods were chosen to investigate the experiences and perceptions of participants related to professional learning and succession planning narrated in a case study design form.

Although the case study is "one of the most challenging of all social science endeavors" (Yin, 2003, p. 1), this research strategy reflected the purpose and the goals of this study. The case study design provided an opportunity to work inductively from the facts to develop a theory (Gillham, 2000). It was noted by Hakim (2000) that case study by "[u]sing a variety of data collection techniques and methods allows a more rounded, holistic study than with any other design" (Hakim, 2000, p. 58). In addition, Hakim noted that case studies "are a useful design" for studying organizations, like schools, businesses, workplaces, and other settings (p. 68). Likewise, Yin (2003) stated that "[a]s a research strategy, the case study is used in many situations to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena" (p. 1). Thus, case study was an appropriate design for this study as it aimed at deducting a holistic understanding of the relations between principal succession planning and professional learning of school leaders.

Data Sources

The data for this study came from a larger study of principal succession and its components in the state of Georgia. The larger study examined four school systems in Georgia with a focus on socialization, professional development, supervision and evaluation, and succession of school leaders in these school systems (Zepeda et al., 2009). The present study investigated principal professional learning and succession, with a focus on the relationship between these two phenomena related to the principalship. For the purposes of this analysis, two systems from the original sample were used. The systems and the participants were assigned pseudonyms to assure anonymity and to protect the participants. Sampling procedures differed in selection the research sites and the participants and are summarized in the following section.

Site selection. The selection of the research site for this multiple-site study was guided by the nature of the research. The gathering of data started with analyzing the background information about possible school systems for research sites (Stake, 2010). Intensity sampling (Patton, 1990) was used to determine participating school systems and allowed the researcher to focus on the large urban system and a medium rural school system. At the time of data collection (2008-2009), the larger system had about 155,000 students and the smaller system about 5,934 students enrolled.

The research sites were selected based on the following criteria: location (in Georgia); public status of a school system; size; socio-economic status; and the adequate yearly progress (AYP) status. Prior to the data collection, an initial visit was made to the school system to meet the participants, tell them about the project, obtain the letter of consent, and start building rapport with the participants. To protect the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to school systems and to the participants.

Site description. The systems in the study differed in socio-economic status, size, and AYP progress. The larger school system, Illustrative County School System, is one of the largest counties in the metro area of the major southeastern city and one of the largest systems in the state. The county is growing and this growth is reflected in the school system's need to open numerous new schools yearly. At the time of data collection (2008-2009), there were 107 schools in the system. In comparison, in 2010, there were 130 schools and other educational facilities in the system. The schools were divided into 15 clusters according to geographical location. Each cluster included 5 to 10 schools that were elementary, middle, and high level schools. In comparison, Remote County School System was located in a rural area. At the time of data collection, Remote County School System had only 9 schools.

The systems in the study are further described in terms of socio-economic status, size, and AYP status. As of 2006, per capita income for the Illustrative County was $32,095 and $23,478 in the Remote County School System. In 2007-2008 school year Illustrative County School System reported 39.6% as economically disadvantaged, while Remote County School Sytem reported 59.9% of student population as economically disadvantaged. For more information about the number of schools in the research sites, see Table 3.2., *System Description*.

Table 3.2

System Description

School District	Total Number of Schools	Number of Elem. Schools	Number of Middle Schools	Number of High Schools	Total Enrollment (2007-2008)
Illustrative County School System	107	68	20	19	154,901
Remote County School System	9	6	2	1	5,934

(Georgia State Department of Education, n.d.)

Participant sampling. The participants in the study were chosen using purposeful selection "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Purposeful selection started with choosing participant criteria. The major participant selection criterion was employment as a principal, superintendent, or central office personnel in one of the two school districts in the study at the time of data collection. For the purpose of this study, only principals, central office personnel, and a superintendent were interviewed.

Table 3.3

System AYP information (2005-2010)

Year	System	Illustrative County School System	Remote County School System	State of Georgia
2010	System AYP	No	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	91.5%	80.0%	77.4%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	108 (118)	8 (10)	1718 (2221)
2009	System AYP	No	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	99.1%	90.0%	86.0%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	108 (109)	9 (10)	1867 (2172)
2008	System AYP	No	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	96.2%	80.0%	79.9%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	101 (105)	8 (10)	1721 (2153)
2007	System AYP	No	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	91.1%	90.0	82.2%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	92 (101)	9 (10)	1726 (2100)
2006	System AYP	No	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	84.2%	90.0%	79.3%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	N/A	9 (10)	1642 (2071)
2005	System AYP	No	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	89.1%	80.0%	81.9%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	N/A	8 (10)	1670 (2040)

(Georgia State Department of Education, n.d.)

Illustrative County School System was represented by 11 participants: a superintendent, 4 principals, and 6 central office people that reflected specific configuration of its central office level, and job division of certain positions. Remote County School System was represented by seven participants: a superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of professional development, and four principals.

Age, race, and gender were not used as participant selection criteria. It was typical purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) because the participants were selected to reflect average school administrators that experienced professional development and succession and who were willing to provide rich descriptions of those experiences. Although researchers do not agree on the desired sample size for a case study (Merriam, 1998), two interviews with each of the 18 participants provided enough information to ensure data redundancy and saturation in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Collection Methods and Techniques

Three major principles of data collection for case study (Yin, 2003) were followed: the researcher used multiple sources of evidence, created a case study database, and maintained a chain of evidence. Case study required the use of data from multiple data sources. Yin (2003) suggested six major sources of data for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. For this multiple case study, interviews, participant observations, and documents were selected as data collection methods that have been most commonly used in case studies (Bassey, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2010). See Table 3.4 for the detailed description of data sources.

Interviews. The individual interview was the main data collection method. Participants were asked to engage in four, two-hour individual interviews (about 8 hours total),

approximately one per month. For the purpose of this study, data from two interviews (on

professional development and on sucession) with every participant were used. Additionally,

excerpts from the interview on socialization were used to intoduce participants. The majority of

the socialization interview was not used for this study because these topics discussed were not

related to the research questions.

Table 3.4

Data Sources

Source of Data	Description
Individual interviews	Two interview protocols were used: • Professional development of principals • Succession of school leaders
Artifacts and documents	Examples of collected artifacts: Promotion frameworks Job descriptions Professional development plans Meeting agendas Human resource records Succession plans
Fill-in notes	Taken during an interview, fill-in notes captured observational data as well as important quotes and ideas expressed by the participants
Field notes	Summary of experiences, notes, and reflections of the team of two researcher at the end of each day of field work and data collection
Memos	Researcher's reflections on the process during data collection and analysis.

If asked, participants were provided with a copy of the transcription of each interview

and given the opportunity to amend or clarify as they deemed necessary; none of them took up

this offer. Minimal follow-up questions were asked via e-mail or telephone. Although the follow-up questions were asked to probe the responses, the researcher stayed close to the structure of the interview guides. All of the questions on the protocol were asked of all participants to satisfy the requirements of data collection for a case study.

The interview was chosen as research method because it allowed to collect rich data on how school leaders experienced professional development and principal succession and to get the details of their experiences and their opinions about those events and programs. As Seidman (1998) stated: "[a]t the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3). The interviews used for this study were predominantly open-ended questions and "[t]heir major task is to build upon and explore their participants' responses to those question" (Seidman, 1998, p. 9).

The interviews were semi-structured; the questions were developed in the summer of 2008 by the team of researchers and reviewed individually, in pairs, and by the team. Semi-structured interviews included more and less structured questions based on the interview protocols. The questions were hypothetical, ideal position, and interpretive (Merriam, 1998). Because it is recommended to test the interview's design (Philips & Stawarski, 2008), these interview protocols were tested on people outside of the research team who have had experience in educational administration and leadership. However, the interviews were discussed during the team weekly meetings and the interview protocols were amended to include additional questions or to reword the original questions according to what was found in the field. All of the interviews used for this study were conducted in person by two researchers: while one researcher was the lead interviewer, the other was taking observational notes (fieldnotes) and asked follow-up questions to clarify any questions that may have arisen.

Documents. Documents were sought because they neither "intrude upon or [nor] alter the setting in ways that the presence of investigator often does," and were not influenced by "whims of human beings" (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). Documents as artifacts were collected from participants if they were willing to share them. Artifacts included but were not limited to professional development plans, succession plans, evaluation forms and programs, job descriptions for principal and central office positions, etc. In additions, some documents were downloaded from the school systems' websites (i.e., school system organization chart, division of schools into clusters, some professional development programs that were available from the school system's website). Data from collected documentation were used to supplement interview data because "[i]n case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2003, p. 87).

Observations. Observations help the researcher better understand the case (Stake, 2010). Every interview was conducted by two researchers: one was the lead interviewer who was following the interview protocol, and the other researcher was taking observational notes based on casual, less formal observations (Yin, 2003). The focus of the observations was the interviewee. The purpose of observation was to note the attitudes, behaviors, hesitation to answer some questions, as well as non-verbal behaviors of the interviewee. The observer was filling a fill-in form as an observation form and was acting as "observer as a participant" (Merriam, 1998, p. 101). The fill-in form had all the questions from the questionnaire with a space after every question, so that the observer could fill in notes directly related to the questions asked. Observational notes were discussed by the interviewers after the interview to "increase the reliability of observational evidence" (Yin, 2003, p. 93).

Data Management

Data storage system is essential to a case study (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2003). To manage all the data that were collected in 2008-2009, a special accounting system was developed. It was a web-based system that accounted for every document that was added to the database. The following documents were accounted for: audio file of the interview (there were two audio files for each interview as both researchers present during the interview had recorders), raw transcriptions, formatted transcriptions, fill-in forms, and fieldnote forms. It was also agreed to use a file naming format, so that all the files were named following the same rule including the last name of the interviewee, position, topic of the interview, type of the document, and the name of the county.

Chain of Evidence. A chain of evidence was maintained to "increase the reliability of the information in a case study" and to help the readers of the study to understand the steps taken by the researcher to make the conclusions presented in the final report (Yin, 2003, p. 105). Research questions were linked to the case study protocol and collected data were systematized in the case study database. In the process of data analysis, citations were selected to support themes that laid the ground for the final case study report in the process of data coding (see Figure 3.3).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a case study included detailed descriptions and analysis of the case and its setting (Creswell, 1998). To ensure that the reader understands the setting, a detailed description of the school systems and of participants were provided prior to the findings of data analysis. Data analysis was an ongoing process that started at the data collection stage when the

researcher was taking notes and memos (Merriam, 1998) because analysis should be interpreting

first impressions as well as final conclusions (Stake, 2010).
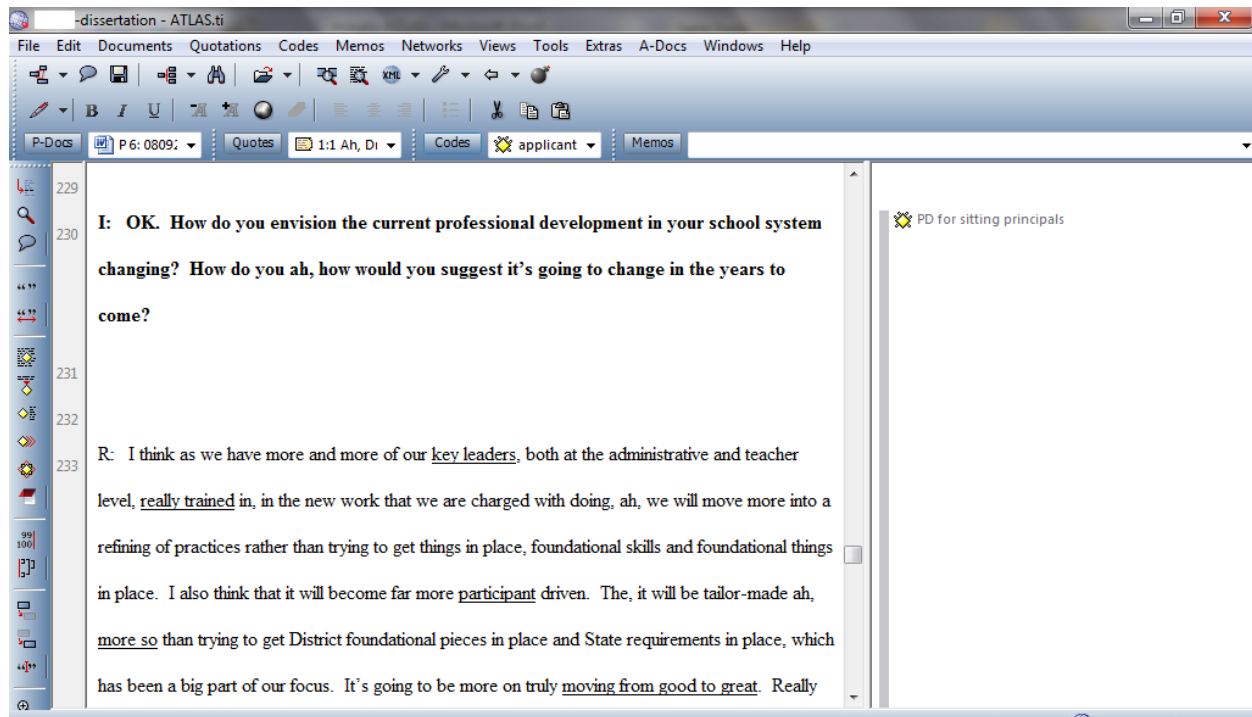
Figure 3.3. Coding the Interviews Using ATLAS.ti

Two types of analysis were used: thematic analysis and membership categorization

analysis. Data analysis involved the interpretation of individual experiences of professional

learning and succession by principals followed by examination of those experiences as

articulated by the principals and central office leaders and aggregation of experiences of all

participants in the study.

The analysis of data combined thematic analysis with membership categorization analysis

(MCA). The thematic analysis yielded major themes relevant to the participants' experiences of

and perceptions about principal professional learning and succession. MCA expanded and

enriched the initial analysis by exploring the categories school leaders use while talking about professional learning and succession. The comparison of the categories used in describing these two topics related to school leadership further assisted in exploring participants' portrayals of the relationship between principal professional learning and principal succession.

Within-case analysis. Two individual case studies were conducted. The researcher worked individually with the data collected in two school systems and conducted thematic and membership categorization analysis of the interview data and qualitative content analysis of collected documents. Figure 3.4 summarized the within-case data analysis.
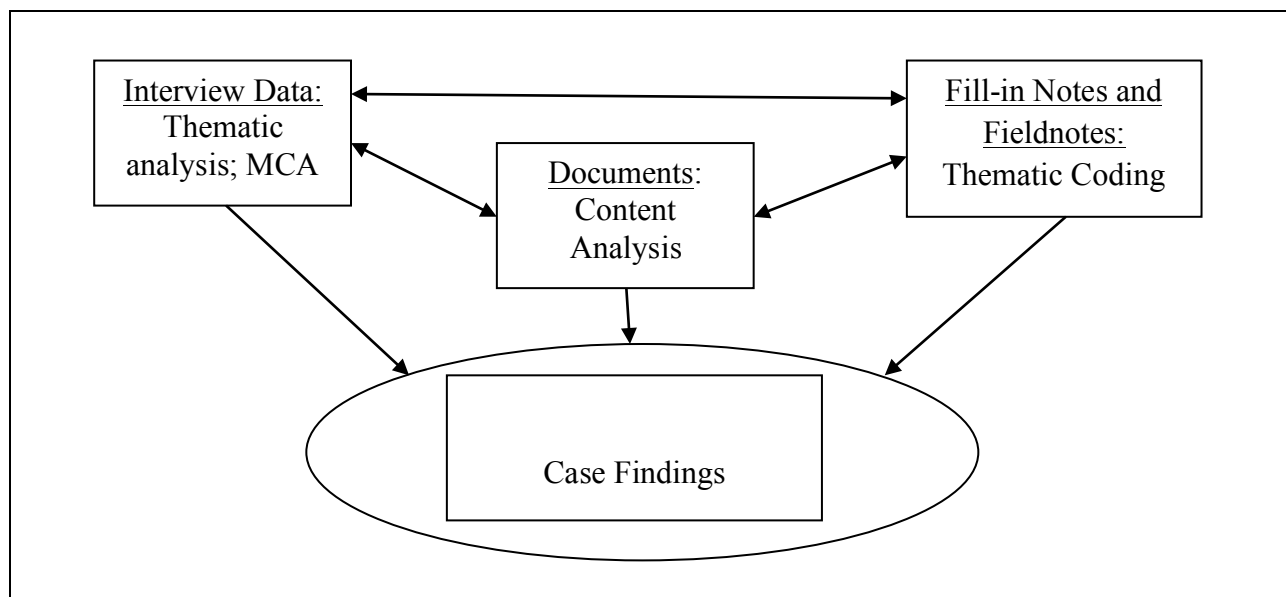
Figure 3.4. Within-case Data Analysis

It was noted that the "analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies" (Yin, 2003, p. 109). To frame the data analysis for this case study, two analytic strategies were combined: relying on theoretical propositions and

developing a case description (Yin, 2003). Theoretical propositions were developed based on

the initial literature review and guided the development of interview protocols. However, the

researcher did not want to limit herself to these predetermined propositions and developed a case

description that organized a study around the major themes revealed by data analysis. Pattern

matching (comparing empirical model and predicted model) and explanation building were

employed as analytic techniques to explore the individual cases, while cross-case synthesis

served the purposes of multiple-case analysis (Yin, 2003).

Content analysis. Content analysis is a "careful, detailed, systematic examination and

interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and

meanings" (Berg, 2009, p. 338). Qualitative conventional content analysis was used to analyze

documents retrieved from the participants (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Conventional content

analysis starts with observation; codes are derived in the process of data analysis from the data;

are not presupposed or theory-generated. The codes are further combined into themes. The texts

are analyzed as a whole, not separately. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) summarized that "The

researcher is usually able to gain a richer understanding of a phenomenon with this approach

[conventional content analysis]" (p. 1286).

Although the content can be described as words, images, video, tools, or services, this

study focused on collected artifacts and the written text was the content for analysis. A content

inventory (file name, county, data collected, etc.) was kept by the researcher and was revisited

throughout the analysis. The content map was developed to log the concepts that emerged in the

analysis process. The coded data were further grouped into three major categories (professional

learning, succession, and connection) and were used in developing the themes and theoretical

constructs. Finally, content analysis was impacted by constructionism, "the theoretical orientation taken by the researcher" that was doing this study (Berg, 2009, p. 339).

Thematic analysis. Although this case study incorporated some descriptive accounts of phenomena of interest, the researcher further advanced the analysis by constructing themes and categories (Merriam, 1998). The coding procedure and elaboration of codes, themes, and theoretical constructs followed the process suggested by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Thus, the codes were merely used to identify recurring ideas; the themes were chosen based on the analysis and categorization of codes/ideas and then the theoretical constructs were identified to combine the themes into the overarching groups.

Coding process included six steps: (1) developing the codebook, (2) coding the text; (3) elaboration of codes; (4) selecting repeating ideas; (5) developing themes; and, (6) organizing data into ideas, themes, and theoretical constructs. The process was cyclical, and the researcher compared theoretical constructs against the raw data to ensure that the findings reflected the data (see Figure 3.5).
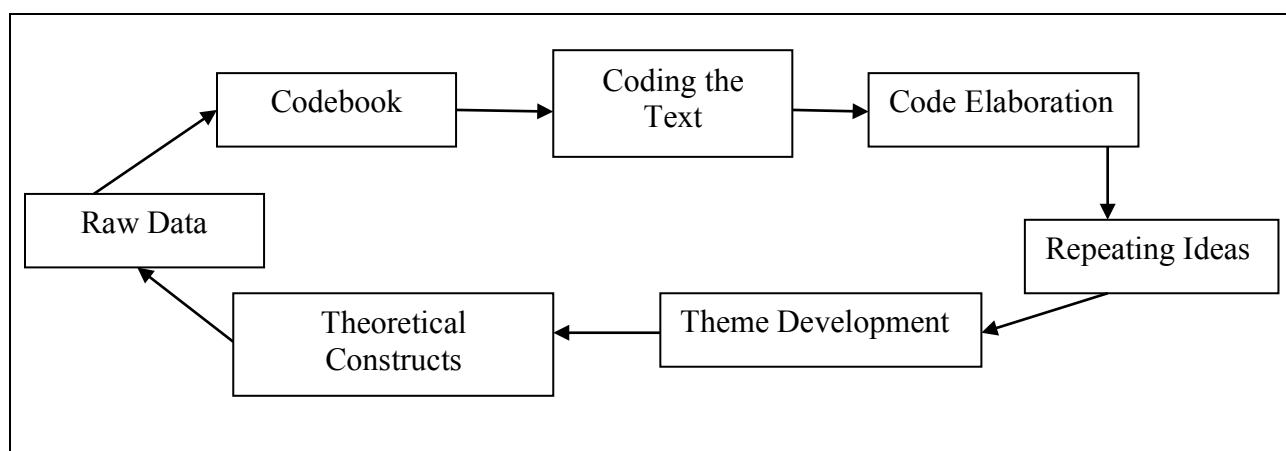
Figure 3.5. Data Analysis: Developing Themes, Categories, and Constructs

After the interviews were transcribed and transcripts read, code names were developed

and defined. Then, the researcher systematized the code names and their meaning in the

codebook. In addition to the set of the predetermined codes based on the analysis of interview

protocol, other codes were developed if needed during coding. The coding and systematization

of transcript data were conducted by using computer-assisted data analysis software (CAQDAS),

namely, Atlas.ti. Then the codes were named, defined, characterized, and supported by special

conditions under which the code works, propositions, and illustrations (see Figure 3.6).
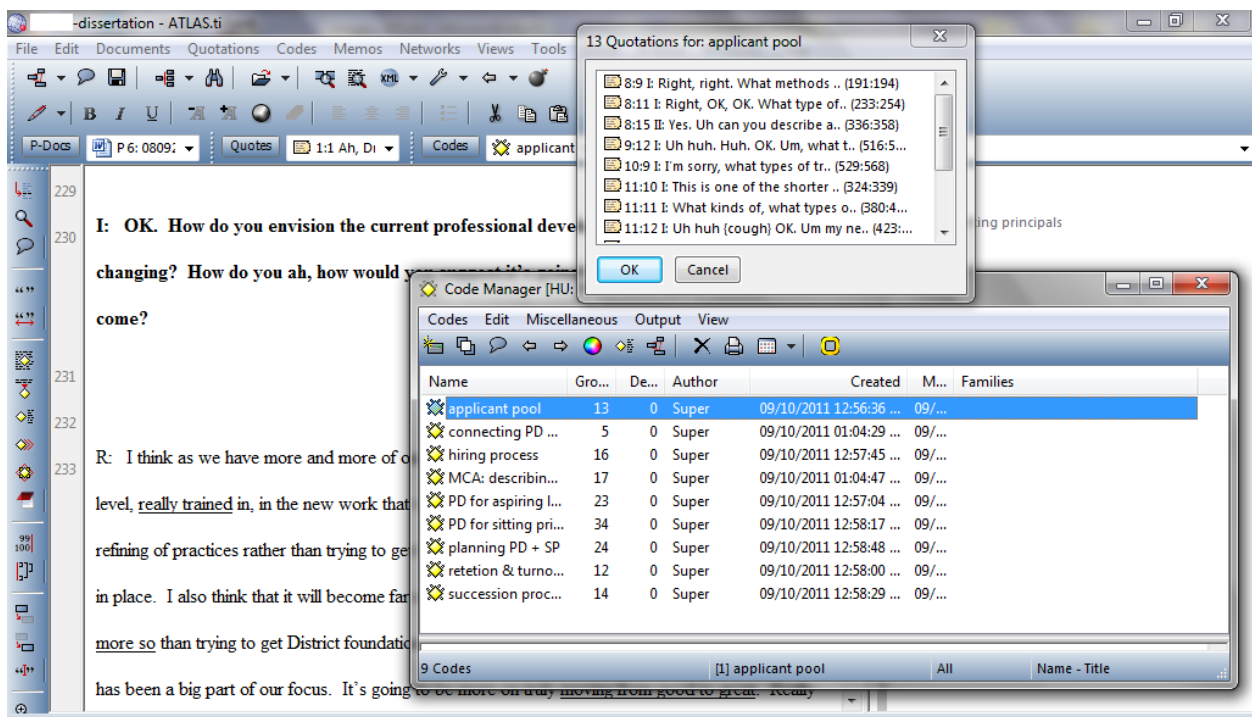
Figure 3.6. Using ATLAS.ti for to Analyze and Manage Data

Codes and quotes supporting them were grouped into the categories of repeated ideas and

then themes were developed based on these categories. Categories had to reflect the purpose of

the research, be exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitizing, and conceptually congruent

(Merriam, 1998). Finally, theoretical constructs were formulated by applying the principles of

professional development and adult learning theory to the themes that resulted from data

analysis. Major rival (alternative) interpretations and researcher's prior knowledge were also

accounted for to ensure the highest quality of the analysis (Yin, 2003).

To identify themes, the data followed "The three Cs" process: raw data—codes—

categories—concepts (Lichtman, 2010). Through data coding, "a structure in the data is

developed as a step towards a comprehensive understanding of the issue, the field, and last but

not least the data themselves" (Flick, 2007, p. 101). Data coding followed a six-step process

suggested by Lichtman (2010, p. 198):

1. Initial coding. Going from responses to some central idea of the responses.
2. Revisiting initial coding.
3. Developing an initial list of categories or central ideas.
4. Modifying your initial list based on additional rereading.
5. Revisiting your categories and subcategories.
6. Moving from categories to concepts (themes).

The researcher imported pictures and documents (the artifacts) into Atlas.ti to code them.

Furthermore, Atlas.ti provided "the capacity to create conceptual diagrams showing links

between emerging ideas" (Silverman, 2005, p. 201). Using the program made data coding more

manageable by providing the ability: "to locate terms in text quickly; (2) the ability to identify

text associated with terms, and (3) the ease of storing and accessing information in comparison to

the old ways of color coding or sorting on the dining table" (Lichtman, 2010, p. 201).

Membership categorization analysis. Membership categorization analysis (MCA) has

been traditionally described as a part of ethnomethodological inquiry. The main steps of MCA,

as suggested by Sacks, invite the researcher to "find or make one's common sense of some piece

of talk or text, and then turn that sense into an object of investigation. The aim of analysis is to

identify *how* sense is achieved" (Eglin, 2003, p. 9, emphasis in the original). Unlike

conversation analysis, over time MCA "had for the most part faded from central attention" (Schegloff, 2007, p. 462), but MCA has recently started to gain recognition in different disciplines. In fact, there is a difference among the scholars who present MCA as an independent method (Eglin & Hester, 2003; Silverman, 2006) and those who believe that MCA is a part of conversation analysis (Schegloff, 2007). Regardless of this division, MCA provides researchers with an opportunity to explore the details of the participants' talk that may not be unveiled by other data analysis methods.

Membership categorization analysis is focused on the use of three major components: membership categories (MC), membership categorization devices (MCD), and category predicates. Figure 3.7 summarizes the definitions and examples of these components.

Component	Definition	Example
Membership category	Classifications, groups, or types used to describe people.	Politician, nerd, granny, astronaut
Membership categorization device	A collection of membership categories used to describe certain categories of people accompanied by the rules of application.	Family; student-teacher
Category predicates	Category predicates bound the action to a certain person (i.e., in the phrase 'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up' the action 'cried' is bounded to a small child).	Rights, obligations, knowledge, competencies

Figure 3.7. Focus of Membership Categorization Analysis based on Hester and Eglin (1997)

This study examined the categories and the collections related to the phenomena of professional development and succession because "categories are interactionally deployable in

formulating locations, doing accusations, making excuses, allocating blame, finding a motive, telling a story, and so on" (Eglin, 2003, p. 9). The study focused on separate analysis of the categories used while describing principal professional development and principal succession followed with the comparison of categories across these two phenomena.

These categories were examined by looking at the interview data from sitting school leaders. The interviews are regarded as a type of institutional talk where data do not "preexist the interview" (Baker, 2002, p. 781); and the interview itself was viewed as conversational interaction. Furthermore, these interviews were conducted in the work offices of the participants and therefore, may be considered as interactions in institutional contexts.

Arminen (2005) defined institutional contexts as "contexts where the interacting parties orient to the goal-rational, institutionalized nature of their action" (p. xi). By regarding these interviews as institutional interaction, it is presumed that school leaders in the study were influenced by the institutional setting of the interview and their leadership positions and therefore, their responses were different from mundane interaction.

Cross-case analysis. The purpose of this study was to analyze professional learning and succession of principals in two school districts and to explore the relationship between these two phenomena. To attain this goal, the cross-case analysis was conducted that compared the results of two individual cases. Cross-case analysis was conducted when the individual cases were completed. Two individual cases explored professional learning and succession in two Georgia school systems; the cross-case analysis was conducted to further examine these phenomena (Stake, 2010). Themes, categories, and theoretical constructs that emerged during the individual case analyses were compared, and overarching themes and categories were constructed. Cross-case analysis report summarized the common themes in professional development and

succession of school leaders that were developed in the analysis process. The details of the cross-case analysis process are graphically presented in Figure 3.8.
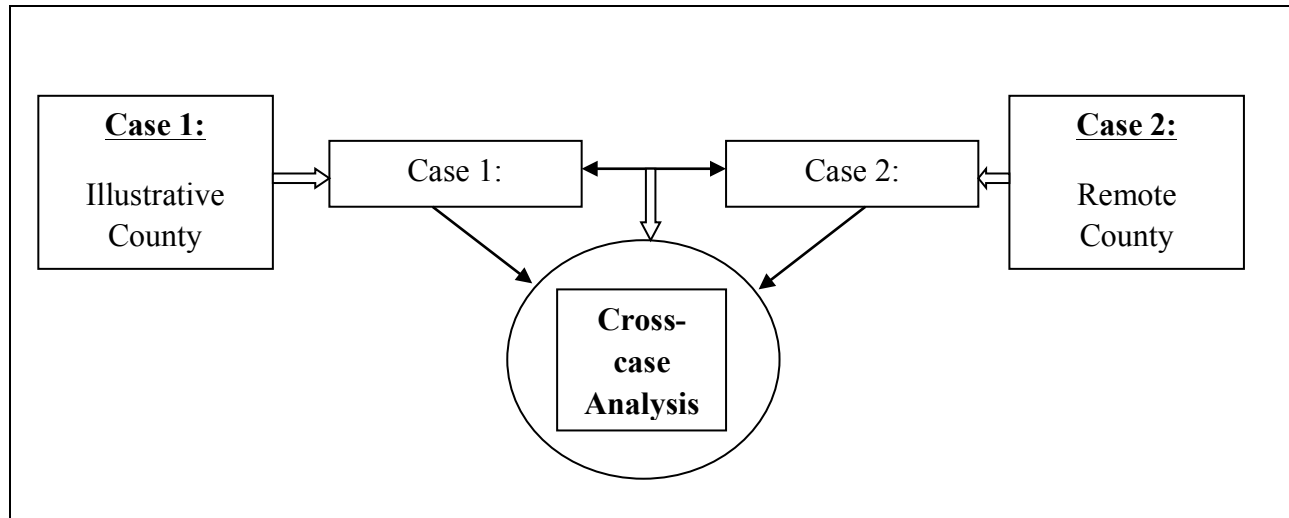
Figure 3.8. Cross-case Analysis Process

The presentation of the findings started with the description of two single cases, followed with the themes that emerged from thematic and membership categorization analyses. Then, a cross-case analysis was presented. Finally, in the discussion section, the themes were interpreted through the lens of theories of leader succession and professional development.

Trustworthiness

Case studies have been criticized for the lack of rigor caused by investigator not following systematic procedures or influencing the findings (Yin, 2003). In the process of assessing data quality, there were measures taken to establish trustworthiness of the findings by ensuring credibility, validity, and reliability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Credibility. Credibility of the study was ensured through triangulation. Seale (1999) asserted that triangulation idea comes from quantitative research and may limit researchers working within naturalistic framework. Seale concluded that triangulation

> can enhance the credibility of a research account by providing an additional way of generating evidence in support of key claims. One does not have to regard it as an 'indefinite' regress if it is accepted that the sort of knowledge constructed by social researchers is always provisional, but is nevertheless attempting to convince a skeptical audience. (p. 61)

To ensure credibility, data were triangulated by comparing the artifacts, interview, and observational data from fieldnotes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). In addition, the researcher analyzed and compared the responses to the same questions from people holding different positions in the system (i.e., principals, central office personnel, and superintendents). Every participant was interviewed two times, and fill-in notes were taken during every interview. Another level of triangulation occurred at the data analysis stage—all transcripts were coded twice using two analytic methods, and the themes and categories that resulted from these analyses were later compared and contrasted.

Validity/Transferability. Construct validity (Yin, 2003) was achieved by providing definitions for main concepts studied (professional learning and succession). Construct validity was further developed because the researcher believed that principals (as recipients) and central office leaders (as planners and providers) were good sources of information about principal professional learning and succession. Transferability of the findings to other settings was achieved through providing rich descriptions of the cases, participants, and findings.

This study incorporated triangulation and outlined the researcher's biases (Merriam, 1998) and employed pattern matching as a part of data analysis to enhance internal validity (Yin, 2003). Peer debriefing and examination were also used in the process of data analysis to ensure

internal validity. During the weekly team meetings, to address external validity, data collected by multiple researchers were compared and multi-site designs and rich descriptions were provided. In addition, the researcher reported personal and professional information that may have influenced the data collection and interpretation.

Reliability/Dependability. Reliability, or the consistency of findings over time and accurate representation of the participants, is a concept rooted in a positivist tradition, but was adopted by qualitative researchers. The researcher took detailed accounts of what was done in the process of data collection and analysis to "minimize the errors and biases in a study" (Yin, 2003, p. 37). Reliability of the findings was insured by mechanical recording of the interviews, dense descriptions, and direct quotes. Dependability of the findings was ensured through the detailed description of the data collection and analysis processes, supported with examples of the actions that took place.

Generalizability. Silverman (2006) asserted that triangulation and member checks cannot be used for validation of data and suggested using methods of generalizing to a larger population. Although the findings from this study cannot be generalized to a larger population due to the small sample size, purposive sample strategy, and context-dependent knowledge, they may be transferred to the school systems with the same or similar characteristics as those described in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Case study results serve the purpose of analytic generalization and result in theory generation based on the case findings (Yin, 2003). The findings contribute to the overall theory of principal professional learning and succession planning and will be summarized to offer propositions based on the findings (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Finally, to acquire confirmability, close examination of the research findings by a peer reviewer was conducted.

Ethics. Ethical issues are important in qualitative research (Bassey, 1999; Patton, 1990). To avoid major pitfalls that "are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings" (Merriam, 2009, p. 230), the researcher provided pseudonyms for research sites and participants in the study to assure anonymity of responses. There were no observations (or any other type of data collection) conducted without the awareness of the participants. The documents collected as artifacts and used in data analysis were public records and did not present ethical problems. The ethical issues checklist (Patton, 1990) was used to ensure that ethical considerations were accounted for: the purpose of research and methods that would be used were explained; the researcher clarified risks to participants, ensured confidentiality, and obtained informed consent; and data were collected within strict boundaries established in the institutional review board (IRB) application.

Methodological Assumptions

The major underlying methodological assumptions for this study were that the participants had experienced phenomena of interest and were willing to share their experiences and opinions with the researcher. It was assumed that the number of interviews with every participant and the lengthy stay in the field collecting the data would result in building the rapport with the participants and they would be willing to share their opinions about principal professional learning and succession in their districts. Other methodological assumptions included, but were not limited to,

- the research site and participant sample was varied enough to provide rich data for a case study;

- the participants were representative of school leaders in the school districts in the study;

- the use of multiple sources provided comprehensive data to make valid inferences and to triangulate the findings;

- the case was bounded by the time of data collection and by the research sites selected for the study; and,

- the belief that a small number of research sites can provide sufficient information for a rich and detailed case study (Merriam, 1998).

It was assumed that selected school systems provided some form of professional development for school leaders, and the participants experienced principal succession. In addition, it was presupposed that principal professional learning was linked to principal succession, but the strength of this link was not presupposed. However, the nature and characteristics of succession and professional learning for current and aspiring leaders were not assumed and had to be discovered in the process of data analysis.

Strengths and Limitations

      Strengths. The strengths of this study lie in comparison of data from participants at different levels of school leadership, identifying current practices of principal professional learning and succession planning, and addressing the topic that has been under researched in education as compared to business or management. Additionally, this study combined two theoretical frameworks (symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology) for the purposes of more detailed data analysis to offer different theoretical perspectives of the same subject.

      Being the main source of data collection, interviews also added strengths to the study, including: flexibility, large amount of data that were collected, and the ability to compare the responses of the participants (semi-structured interviews allowed for the same questions to be asked to all participants). In addition, interviews allowed the researcher to address the attitudes

and the way of thinking of the interviewees; probing and follow-up questions were important and helpful to collect richer data; and interviews were useful for exploration and confirmation of the topics and hypotheses.

Limitations. The sample of the study presented its major limitations. The school systems that participated in the study were not representative of the state of Georgia. One system in the study was an urban system, and one was rural, while the majority of Georgia systems were rural. In addition, not all schools in the county were represented in a sample (when the larger district has 100+ schools, it was difficult to do so), and the participants on the building level were all suggested by the central office leaders, so there was a chance that those having a different opinion on current practices were not included in the sample.

The limitations of case study as a research design included the lack of representativeness, and ethical concerns (Merriam, 1998). The weaknesses of the interview as the main method of data collection included the possibility that some questions may have been asked in a leading form; the researcher's bias that may have played a role in the way questions were asked, and the responses that would not be generalizable to larger audiences. In addition, the participants may have given only socially acceptable responses and may have forgotten important facts at the time they were interviewed. Finally, case study data presented a poor basis for generalization (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2003), and while the findings may be transferable to school systems with a similar context, the findings cannot be generalized.

The following four chapters present the findings of the data analysis. In the next chapter, the single case of the Illustrative County School System is presented. The chapter examines major findings that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data and offers four major themes connecting principal succession and professional learning in the context of this district.

CHAPTER 4

ILLUSTRATIVE COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM—A CASE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the connections between principal succession and professional learning through the analysis of the current practices in leader identification, development, support, and retention in two Georgia school districts. This study situated professional learning in the context of principal succession. Three major aspects of this topic were targeted: professional development provided for current administrators; professional learning as an instrument for preparing prospective school leaders; and the relationship between professional development and principal succession. The study was guided by three overall research questions:

1. How do current leader identification, development, support, and retention practices foster principal professional growth and build leadership pipeline?

2. How do the district leaders describe an "effective" principal in conversations on leader professional development and succession planning?

3. In the context of participating districts and school leaders, what is the relationship between principal succession and professional learning?

To address these questions, the researcher sought to understand the building level and central office leaders' experiences of and perspectives about leader succession and professional development provided for current and aspiring principals. This chapter focuses on the context of the larger school district in the study—the Illustrative County School System. To comply with

116

the requirements of the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB), the system and the participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The references to the county and the school system website were also pseudonymized accordingly.

Illustrative County Context

The Illustrative County was founded in 1818 and started as an agricultural community, with tanneries being among the largest employers (Illustrative County Government, n.d). Conveniently located nearby a large metropolitan city, Illustrative County has been attracting new residents and continues to grow. The projected population of 789,499 in 2008 increased to 805,321 in 2010 (U. S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Comparison of the U.S. Census of 2000 and 2010 numbers shows that the county experienced an over 224,000 (36.9%) increase in residents over the last decade.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census data, the county population was predominantly White (53.3%), with Black (23.6%), Asian (10.6%), and other races (12.5%) considered as minority groups. Compared with the state percentages, Illustrative County had considerably higher number of Asian population (state percentage: 3.2%). The population of the county was relatively young, with 30.2% persons being under 18 years old and 6.8% being 65 years old and over (U. S. Census Bureau, n.d.). From the persons aged 25 and over, 87.6% graduated from high school, and 35.2% had a Bachelor's or higher degree. Per capita income ($27,301) and median household income ($58,732) were higher in the Illustrative County than those in the state ($25,098 and $47,469, respectively).

School System Context

Illustrative County School System is an accredited district that is one of the largest, growing systems in Georgia. The increase in the number of schools and students can be partially

attributed to the convenient location and improvements in student achievement as reported in the system's annual report card. The mission and vision of the school system focus on providing a world-class education so that students will become successful lifelong learners.

At the time of the study, Illustrative County School System enrolled over158, 000 students and employed about 23,000 people (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). The total number of urban and suburban schools in the county was 114; out of these 69 were elementary schools, 20 were middle schools, and 16 were high schools. The remaining schools were charter schools, and alternative schools. The system planned to open several new schools in the years following this study due to the projected increase in the number of students and the overall population of the county.

Given the size of the district, the schools were grouped into 15 clusters, divided into five geographical areas supervised by an area superintendent. Each cluster included 5 to 10 schools and had at least 1 high school. The increase in the number of schools caused the creation of new clusters; there were 18 clusters in 2011 (as compared with 15 in 2008 when the data were collected). The organizational structure (see Figure 4.1) positioned the superintendent as the chief executive officer (CEO) of the school system. The superintendent, along with the chief of staff and the executive director for administration and policy, supervised five major divisions overseeing the school clusters that were directly linked to individual schools and their leadership.

Staff profile. At the time of the data collection (2008-2009), the staff of the Illustrative County School System had an average of about 19 years of experience for administrators, the average of about 14 years for support personnel, and the average of about 11.5 years for teachers. These numbers were slightly lower in the Illustrative County School System as compared to the state averages (see Table 4.1).

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  │                  │  │     Superintendent      │  │  Administration and   │
  │                  │  │                         │  │        Policy         │
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Division of Information Management	Division of Business and Finance	Division of Teaching and Learning	Division of Human Resources	Division of Facilities and Operations
Chief Information Officer	**Chief Financial Officer**	**Chief Academic Officer**	**Chief Human Resource Officer**	**Chief Operations Officer**

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Figure 4.1. Organizational Flowchart of the Illustrative County School System

Table 4.1

School District Certified Personnel Years of Experience Breakdown by Type

	Administrators (% of staff)	Support Personnel (% of staff)	PK-12 Teachers (% of staff)
Illustrative	18.98 (5.1%)	14.06 (5.9%)	11.58 (89.0%)
State Average	19.93 (6.3%)	15.41 (8.4%)	12.25 (85.3%)

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

The ratios of the certified personnel in the Illustrative County School System were higher than the state averages. The teacher to administrator ratio was 17:1; the teacher to support personnel ratio was 15:1; and the teacher to staff ratio was 8:1. The student to teacher ratio (14:1) was the same in the Illustrative County School System and in the state of Georgia (see table 4.2).

Table 4.2

School District Certified Personnel Position Ratios Breakdown by Type

	Teacher: Administrator	Teacher: Support Personnel	Teacher: Staff	Student: Teacher
Illustrative	18 : 1	15 : 1	8 : 1	15 : 1
State Average	14 : 1	10 : 1	6 : 1	14 : 1

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

Student profile. At the time of data collection, the Illustrative County School System enrolled 154,901 students. The largest student demographic group was White (36%), followed by Black (27%), Hispanic (22%), Asian (10%), and Multiracial (4%). These numbers were

120

different from the state averages that showed higher percentages of White and Black students

and lower percentages of Asian and Hispanic students (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Student Population and Racial Breakdown

	Asian (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Native American (%)	White (%)	Multiracial (%)
Illustrative	10	27	22	0	36	4
State Average	3	38	10	0	46	3

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

The percentages of students receiving special education services in the Illustrative

County School System and in the state were similar (11.1% and 11.2%, respectively). However,

the Illustrative County School System enrolled higher percentages of the students in the gifted

programs but lower in vocational programs (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Percentage of Students in Special Programs

	Special Education (K-12)	Gifted (K-12)	Vocational Labs (9-12)	Alternative Programs (K-12)
Illustrative	11.1	12.8	35.9	0.9
State Average	11.2	9.0	54.7	1.9

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

Table 4.5

System AYP Information (2005-2010)

Year	System	Illustrative County School System	State of Georgia
2010	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	91.5%	77.4%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	108 (118)	1718 (2221)
2009	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	99.1%	86.0%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	108 (109)	1867 (2172)
2008	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	96.2%	79.9%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	101 (105)	1721 (2153)
2007	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	91.1%	82.2%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	92 (101)	1726 (2100)
2006	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	84.2%	79.3%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	N/A	1642 (2071)
2005	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	89.1%	81.9%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	N/A	1670 (2040)

(Georgia State Department of Education, n.d.)

System performance profile. For the last six academic years, Illustrative County School System did not meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). However, the system had been making progress in student achievement as demonstrated by the increasing number of schools making AYP every year (see Table 4.5). In 2010, there were 10 schools (out of 118) that did not meet the AYP benchmarks. As compared with the progress of the state of Georgia in meeting the AYP, the Illustrative County School System had been making progress toward meeting the requirements for student achievement.

The indicators of student achievement were higher in the Illustrative County School System as compared to the state percentages (see Table 4.6). The average composite Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score of 1548 was higher in the Illustrative County School System than the state average of 1477.

Table 4.6

Student Achievement

	% Students Take SAT	Avg. Comp. SAT Score	% Students Take AP Exams	AP Exams Scores 3 or Higher	% HOPE Scholarship Eligibility	Grad. Rates	Drop. Rates Grades 7-12	Drop. Rates Grades 9-12
Illustrative	70.3	1548	14.6	64.4	40.5	79.1	2.0	2.8
State Average	55.7	1477	8.6	52.7	38.5	75.4	2.6	3.6

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

In the Illustrative County School System, 14.6% of the students took advance placement exams (in comparison, the state percentage was 8.6%). In addition, the Illustrative County

123

School System had a higher graduation rate of 79.1% (the state average was 75.4%). The

dropout rate for grades 7 to 12 and 9 to 12 were lower in the Illustrative County School System

(see Table 4.6).

At the time of data collection, 40.5% of all students in the school system were eligible for

the Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (Hope) scholarship. In the 2007-2008 academic

year, the Illustrative County School System offered over 3,000 advanced placement (AP) courses

and the percentage of students scoring 3 or higher on the AP exam (64.4%) was considerably

higher than the state average (52.7%).

Illustrative County School System Participant Profiles

In this study, Illustrative County School System was represented by 11 participants (7

central office leaders and 4 principals). These participants were purposefully selected based on

the superintendent's recommendation as leaders who could provide rich data about principal

professional learning and succession. There were six male and five female leaders from the

Illustrative County School System who differed in terms of the highest academic degree, years in

position, years in educational administration, and the total number of years in education (see

Table 4.7). Five participants had doctoral degrees, five had specialist degrees, and one had a

master's degree. In addition, five participants were new to their position: three principals, an

area superintendent, and an associate superintendent were in the first year in a seat.

Mr. Lance Adams, Superintendent. As superintendent of the Illustrative County

School System, Mr. Adams had worked in education for 44 years at the time of this study. Mr.

Adams started as a teacher in 1964 and was helping an assistant principal with administrative

duties. Thus, when the position of an assistant principal became vacant, Mr. Adams was

promoted into the administrative position. Since 1967, Mr. Adams has served in different

administrative positions, including as assistant principal, central office positions, and the

superintendency in two school systems in Georgia. During that time, Mr. Adams went to

graduate school to receive a leadership degree and worked in the central office before becoming

a superintendent. Looking back at his long tenure in education, Mr. Adams shares, "I've always

liked my jobs. I've always worked for good people. I've always worked with good people."

Table 4.7

Illustrative County School System Participant Data

Name	Title	Highest Degree	Years. in Position	Years. in Admin.	Years. in Ed.
Lance Adams	Superintendent	M.S.	13	41	44
Albert Brown	Associate Superintendent	Ed.S.	< 1	20	33
Ann Vargas	Chief Human Resources Officer	Ph.D.	8	20	26
Paul Hopkins	Executive Dir. For Ldr. Dvlpm.	Ed.D	4	32	34
Dana Nicholson	Dir. of Leadership Development	Ed.S.	5	20	38
John Long	Chief Academic Officer	Ed.D.	< 1	8	18
Howard Rowe	Area Superintendent	Ed.D.	< 1	18	27
Jessica Eagle	High School Principal	Ed.S.	2	8	26
Jane Salton	Elementary Principal	Ed.S.	< 1	6	13
Jack Timpson	Middle School Principal	Ph.D.	< 1	4	21
Rose Shows	Middle School Principal	Ed.S.	2	9	18

At the time of this study, Mr. Adams served as a superintendent for 13 years, becoming

one of the longest-serving superintendents in the state. Other participants from the Illustrative

County School System described Mr. Adams as a visionary, passionate, and successful leader and attributed the success of the school system to the visionary leadership of their superintendent. Mr. Adams, however, believed in distributed leadership and named the principal as the single most important person for the success of the school. To help these principals succeed, Mr. Adams provided them with continuous learning and development opportunities and mentoring and asserted that successful principals distributed leadership in their schools and developed future leaders among their teachers.

Mr. Adams is a recipient of numerous awards for his professional career in education. Most notable, recently he was named a Superintendent of the Year and Citizen of the Year in Georgia. A leader of many civic organizations in the state, Mr. Adams believes in the power of education and is proud to live and work in the community that values education and supports its schools.

Mr. Albert Brown, Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning. Mr. Brown, appointed as an Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning of the Illustrative County School System right before the data collection for this study started, has worked in education for 33 years, 13 of which he spent in the Illustrative County School System. Mr. Brown started his educational career in 1976 as a social studies teacher. After that, Mr. Brown served as an assistant principal, social studies coordinator, a high school principal, and an area superintendent.

As an associate superintendent, Mr. Brown was overseeing three departments (Curriculum and Instruction, Accountability and Assessment, and Special Education) and envisioned multiple future challenges of the system; among them, changing technology, online learning, and continuous improvement. Mr. Brown praised the culture of the Illustrative County

School System and strongly believed in the importance of strategic planning to ensure leadership continuity and the overall success of the school district.

Dr. Ann Vargas, Chief Human Resources Officer. Dr. Vargas has worked in education for 26 years at the time of the study. Dr. Vargas grew up wanting to become a nurse, but was unable to afford the cost of nursing school. As, an alternative, Dr. Vargas selected education to save enough money to help pay for the medical degree. However, Dr. Vargas found teaching very interesting and decided to remain in education. During her tenure in education, Dr. Vargas worked as a teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, a human resources officer, and a chief human resources officer.

Dr. Vargas emphasized the importance of mentoring, professional learning, and principal succession to school and district success. Having served as a chief human resources officer for eight years, Dr. Vargas noted that the position has expanded to include new duties and responsibilities, multiple district-level initiatives, recruitment, and retention of the district workforce. Dr. Vargas believed that "you have to build the capacity of leaders. There is no shortage of leaders—it is a shortage of leaders who have the capacity to do what needs to be done." Therefore, Dr. Vargas advocated for the need of targeted job-embedded professional learning for the school leaders that Illustrative County School System planned and provided.

Dr. Paul Hopkins, Executive Director for Leadership Development. Dr. Hopkins has worked in education for 38 years and described his career as "a very long path." This educational path started with a traditional preparation, serving as a teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, an acting superintendent, and a central office leader. At the time of data collection, Dr. Hopkins served as an executive director for leadership development, responsible for leader development and leader preparation to the level envisioned by the superintendent of schools. In

127

addition, Dr. Hopkins coauthored a book—a guide for principals on how to survive in their

position. A firm believer in the power of professional learning, Dr. Hopkins asserted:

> Professional development also includes the ongoing support. That ongoing support is the
> creation of an environment or an atmosphere in which the principal feels comfortable in
> sharing not only success but also failure, sharing those things they are confident about as
> well as those things they are apprehensive about, knowing that the organization will
> support them, both in the successes and in the failures, support them in the things they
> feel really confident about, but also support them in those things that they are
> apprehensive about and fearful of.

Do. Hopkins believed in the power of professional learning and the need for the district to grow

their own leaders. Drawing from multiple external organizations, Dr. Hopkins used these

resources to revitalize and broaden leadership development in the Illustrative County School

System.

Ms. Dana Nicholson, Director of Leadership Development. Ms. Nicholson has served

in multiple roles during her 38 years in education. Ms. Nicholson started as a teacher, worked as

a language arts consultant, a curriculum direction, Title I coordinator, and a staff development

director. Following the classroom experience, Ms. Nicholson served as an assistant principal and

then a principal of an elementary school. At the time of the study, Ms. Nicholson was in her fifth

year of being a director of leadership development of the Illustrative County School System.

Being responsible for leadership development in the district, Nicholson ensured that

veteran principals who are often overlooked received relevant professional learning: She shared:

> I think how we support veteran principals is pivotal to the success of this system.
> Certainly we're looking at 20 new principals, but there are 100 veteran principals and
> that's a huge group. Oftentimes we've been reactive—he is a veteran principal who's had
> x, y, z problems and so we must go out and fix these. And it just makes so much more
> sense for us to try to look at things proactively and plan opportunities for principals and
> try to plan the activities where they would help each other. I see that as having
> tremendous impact.

Nicholson's position in the district allowed her to participate in planning and providing professional learning for aspiring and sitting leaders. She valued that opportunity and spoke highly of the school district culture that placed considerable attention on leadership development.

Dr. John Long, Chief Academic Officer. Dr. Long started his educational career working as a science teacher. During that time, he was provided with opportunities to experience different leadership roles, including being a department chair. Dr. Long then served as an assistant principal and a principal. Reflecting back on his administrative experience, Dr. Long shares, "I was fortunate enough to have opportunities in every area as an assistant principal—curriculum and instruction, testing, discipline, grade academy, and staff development. I was in the right place at the right time." Dr. Long was then promoted to an area superintendent position and at the time of the study, he was serving as a chief academic officer.

Dr. Long believed that principal selection, professional learning, and succession should be guided by student achievement as an ultimate goal. Dr. Long elaborated:

> First and foremost, the conversation has to start with the student achievement and where we are on the continuum of student achievement with the particular school, knowing where the strengths and where the needs are. So we start out with the student achievement piece, but we also look at the community and the fit for the community, what they want in a principal and consider that in our decisions.

Dr. Long was proud to work in the Illustrative County School System and praised processes and practices adopted by the district.

Dr. Howard Rowe, Area Superintendent. Dr. Rowe has worked in different educational positions for 27 years. After teaching for seven years, Dr. Rowe moved into administration and served as an assistant principal, athletics director, and a principal. Dr. Rowe described his tenure as a principal as a very positive and beneficial experience: "I really enjoyed my time at the local school. We had achieved great success during that time and it was a

wonderful growth experience for me." At the time of this study, Dr. Rowe was in the first year

of serving as an area superintendent and was regarding this position as "another great growth

opportunity."

Having served in various leadership positions in the Illustrative County School System,

Dr. Rowe had a broader insider perspective to leadership development in the district. Dr. Rowe

elaborated:

> As a principal you have a voice in your own work, but you also have that support to be
> able to do your job effectively. The neat thing about it is that you can express what your
> concerns are and you know and that you're listened to. In other words, we support the
> principals in what they're trying to accomplish and we try to keep them from making
> mistakes. It's this constant dialogue that principals feel very comfortable being a part of.
> Being a principal is such a huge responsibility, but we continue setting up the principal
> for success, providing supports where needed to negate failure.

Overall, Dr. Rowe believed in educational accountability and was proud that the Illustrative

County School District welcomed and embraced accountability at all levels.

Ms. Jessica Eagle, Rosewood High School Principal. Ms. Eagle has taught for 18

years before moving into administration. Wanting to advance her career, Ms. Eagle earned a

leadership degree and served as an assistant principal for six years. During this time, the

principal mentored Ms. Eagle and encouraged her to pursue the principalship. Therefore, when

the principal retired, Ms. Eagle applied for the position of principal of Rosewood High School.

At the time of the study, Ms. Eagle was in the second year of the principalship, comfortable in

that position, and looking forward to advance the school in the future.

At the time of data collection, Rosewood High School served 3494 students (14%

disadvantaged student population). The student population was predominantly white (60%),

while other ethnic groups were black (16%), Asian (14%), and Hispanic (7%). These

percentages were not reflective of the overall district student enrollment that was 35% white,

28% black, 22% Hispanic, and 11% Asian. In addition, 24.5% of student population was characterized as 'gifted,' while 28% were involved in vocational labs. The school was effective in ensuring student achievement and met AYP every year from 2003 to 2011.

Ms. Jane Salton, Privet Elementary School Principal. In the first year as principal of Privet Elementary School, Ms. Salton has worked in education for 13 years. Majoring in communication, Ms. Salton wanted to pursue a medical career, and she enrolled in an intensive two-year science program in preparation for college. Waiting to be cleared to pursue medical education, Ms. Salton started teaching science in a middle school. During that year, Ms. Salton realized that she liked teaching and decided to stay in education. Since then, Ms. Salton has taught in several districts across the country. After four years of teaching in a high school in the Illustrative County, Ms. Salton was approached by one principal encouraging her to become an administrator. Following that advice, Ms. Salton earned leadership credentials and served as an assistant principal of a middle school for five years before being appointed a principal of a newly-opened elementary school.

The Privet Elementary School had just opened at the time of this study. In its first year, the school served 827 students: 40% of them were economically disadvantaged, 10% were students with disabilities, and 11% were English language learners. Student demographics was black (45%), white (37%), Hispanic (7%), Asian (5%), and multiracial (5%). In addition, 7.5% of student population was gifted and 8.6% were engaged in the Early Intervention Program. The school met AYP in the year the data were collected (2008-2009) and in the two following years.

Dr. Jack Timpson, South Middle School Principal. Dr. Timpson started teaching mathematics in 1988. During his teacher years, Dr. Timpson was mentored by his administrators who encouraged him to advance in his education career. Mr. Timpson was also a coach, but he

described himself as "a bad coach … but a pretty good math teacher." In 1994, Dr. Timpson started pursuing a doctoral degree, while serving as a math department chair and a teacher leader. Following that experience, Dr. Timpson served as an assistant principal for four years. While he recognized the importance of being an assistant principal prior to assuming the principalship, Dr. Timpson recognized that he did not like serving in that position and "would rather be in the classroom" than being an assistant principal. At the time of the study, Dr. Timpson was in the first year of being a principal of the South Middle School, and he believed that all the knowledge and skills he gained and developed while being a department chair and an assistant principal prepared him well to deal with the demands of the principalship.

The South Middle School served 1299 students at the time of the study: 17% were economically disadvantaged, 10% were students with disabilities, and 2% were English language learners. The student population was 57% white, 17% black, 16% Asian, 5% Hispanic, and 5% multiracial. These percentages were not reflective of the system and state percentages of student enrollment by race/ethnicity. In addition, 33.8% of students were gifted and 10.1% were involved in special education programs. The school met AYP every year from 2003 until 2011.

Ms. Rose Shows, Norris Middle School Principal. Ms. Shows started her education career as a teacher of children with special needs, which she jokingly described as "the best training for the principalship." Her principal suggested that Ms. Shows earned leadership credentials, and she pursued school leadership positions. For Ms. Shows it was not an easy decision, but she decided to follow this advice. After graduation, Ms. Shows worked as an assistant principal for seven years and really liked the leadership team of the school. At the time of this study, Ms. Shows was a second year principal of Norris Middle School, and she felt very content working in that position. Norris Middle School served 2538 students at the time of this

study: 32% of the students were economically disadvantaged; 12% were students with disabilities, and 3% were English language learners. The racial makeup of the school was composed of 49% white, 35% black, 7% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 4% multiracial students. In addition, 19.2% of the students were gifted and 11.5% were enrolled in special education programs. Norris Middle School met AYP every year from 2003 until 2011.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principal professional learning and succession. To examine the connections between these two phenomena and educational administration, seven topics related to professional learning and succession of school principals were examined: the applicant pool; professional development for aspiring leaders; the hiring process; retention and turnover of leaders; professional development for sitting principals; principal succession process; and planning of principal professional development and succession. Analysis of the interview data revealed major themes within each of these topics that are presented next in this chapter.

The Applicant Pool: We Don't Have a Shortage of Qualified Applicants Because We Grow Our Own

Although the topic, the applicant pool, is more related to school leader succession, it is also inseparable from leader development and professional growth. The participants expressed views that their leader applicant pool was conceptualized in terms of growing future leaders from the ranks of successful teachers inside the school district. The central office leaders in the study acknowledged the principal shortages reported nationwide, but asserted that this was not true for the Illustrative County. The commonly shared belief was that it was the superintendent's vision

that enabled Illustrative County to have multiple qualified applicants for every leader position

that opened. Brown, an associate superintendent, explained:

> We haven't felt principal shortages in the Illustrative County, but I do think that was one
> of the visionary pieces that Mr. Adams [superintendent] brought. Keeping in mind the
> retirements, anticipating the need for development of aspiring principals, he initiated the
> Leader Academy.

Both central office and building level leaders in the study credited the Leader Academy with

ensuring the school district's success by preparing leaders that can be effective from "day one"

in the principal's seat. The director of leadership development, Nicholson, communicated the

common belief about the role of the Leader Academy when she stated, "I believe that having this

internal training and development program has definitely strengthened the pool."

The participants frequently described the principal applicant pool as 'strong' or 'growing

stronger.' Partly credited to the superintendent's vision and the impact of the Leader Academy,

the strengthening of the applicant pool was also explained in terms of clear and aligned

expectations communicated to the applicants and the aspiring leaders. The executive director for

leadership development Hopkins asserted, "We are clear and specific on the desired leader

characteristics and expectations. Maybe it is because of that clarity and specificity that those

people that were most likely to fit were applying."

Overall, the Illustrative County School System did not experience shortages in the

number of applicants for vacant leadership positions. However, central office leaders expressed

concerns about the quality of the applicants. The general consensus among the participants was

that the district had seen an increase in the number of people with leadership credentials, but

Vargas, chief human resources officer, pointed out the supply and demand mismatch:

> The demand is great and the supply is not as great. You don't have enough leaders that
> are prepared to go into schools today. And forward thinking districts have jumped in the

game in conjunction with the universities to develop their future leaders and to make sure people were prepared to lead schools.

The philosophy of 'growing our own' was deeply ingrained in the Illustrative County leaders and was communicated from the superintendent to the principals to the teachers.

Regarded as the mastermind behind principal development, retention, and succession planning in the district, the superintendent placed principal growth and continuity as one of his top priorities because "a principal is most important to the school's success." Superintendent Adams believed that successful principals had a passion for their schools as well as skills and abilities to lead and manage those schools. In addition to these characteristics, the executive director of leadership development, Hopkins, added instructional leadership, sound judgment, and "knowledge, skills, and talent to do that work." Chief human resources officer Vargas also added passion for education and sound knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The principals in the study discussed most of these characteristics as important to being selected a school leader in the district and asserted that they developed these characteristics in the Leader Academy program that they participated in and valued.

Talking about the leader applicant pool, Illustrative County participants noted several major trends that have occurred in the leader pool over the last years. First, the assistant principals applying for the principalship were doing it earlier in their careers making the applicant pool somewhat younger. Second, the applicant pool has become much more diverse. Associate superintendent Brown explained, "We've been able to grow minority representation in the principal ranks over the last several years because of the change in demographics and the lack of representation of the certain minority groups." Third, the applicant pool for the elementary and middle school principalship was mainly female, whereas the high school leadership pool in the district had more male applicants. Finally, the retirement of the baby

135

boomers, the attrition, and the necessity to open new schools every year resulted in the increased attention to the development of the future leaders "with a clear vision of where we are going, how we are going to get there, and what are the road benchmarks that are going to show that we got there," as shared by Vargas, the chief human resources officer.

The commonly accepted and communicated approach of "growing our own leaders" did not discard external recruitment and hiring. While internal hires were generally seen as stronger leaders, external candidates were sought after to provide "new ideas, freshness, and the new ways to do things" (Eagle, high school principal). Several participants noted that externally hired leaders experienced a learning curve to master "the way things are done here," but nonetheless were sought after to fill leadership vacancies. Overall, although the Illustrative County School System preferred internally groomed candidates for the leadership positions, the main hiring goal was to ensure "the best fit" of the applicant for the school they were applying for the principalship.

In conclusion, the concerns about the applicant pool for current and future leadership positions that were voiced in recent studies (Bush, 2008; Roza 2003; Walker & Kwan, 2009) were not evident in the Illustrative County School System. The main reason this large school district was not worried about the future of their school leadership was because professional learning and growth opportunities were provided for the aspiring leaders, preparing them for the principalship. Although this approach is not new and was evidenced by the university-school district partnerships (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Miller, Devin, & Shoop, 2007), the situation in the Illustrative County School System was different because the system leaders took responsibility for growing their future principals.

Professional Development for Aspiring Leaders: Growing Leadership From Within

Supporting the district's motto of "we are growing our own leaders," the Illustrative County School System provided a variety of professional learning opportunities for their aspiring leaders among teachers and assistant principals. The development of teacher leaders was done predominantly at the school level and was guided by the principal (see table 4.8). The school-based teacher development efforts varied across the schools in the district, but were generally aimed at developing an interest in educational administration and encouraging teachers to pursue leadership degrees. To assist teachers with obtaining degrees in educational administration, the Illustrative County School System partnered with local universities. The cohort-based partnerships were valued, especially because some central office leaders from the district were involved as instructors, "teaching the Illustrative County way of doing things." Therefore, aspiring leaders that graduated from these programs were more familiar with the specific requirements of the school district than the outsiders to the policies and practices of the district.

The most formal professional development program for teachers aspiring to leadership positions was the initiative called Teachers-as-Leaders. Collaboratively developed by the central office and the Illustrative County Chamber of Commerce, Teachers as Leaders has been "very successful in preparing teachers more effective in the classroom, more effective as department chairs, and more effective as school leaders," as described Hopkins, the executive director of leadership development. At the time of the study, the district worked to expand the program to be able to engage more teachers in leadership positions.

Professional learning opportunities provided for assistant principals somewhat overlapped with those available for teacher leaders, but also included specific opportunities for them (see table 4.8). Like teacher leaders, assistant principals benefitted from the initiatives

provided within their schools and clusters. Many principals initiated their own school-based

leader academies or "principal-for-a-day" opportunities that fostered continuous growth of

assistant principals.

Table 4.8

Illustrative County School System Professional Development for Aspiring Leaders

Initiative	Targeted Audience	Purpose
School-based leadership development	Teacher leaders and assistant principals	To identify, support, and mentor aspiring leaders in the school.
Partnership with local universities	Teacher leaders and assistant principal	To assist aspiring leaders with obtaining degrees in leadership.
Teachers-as-Leaders	Teachers	To develop teachers aspiring to educational administration.
Area and Level Meetings	Assistant principals	To develop skills and awareness related to the assistant principals' responsibilities.
Leadership Development II	Assistant principals	To update about the directions of the district and the state.
Summer Leadership Conference	Assistant principals and principals	To outline the system's direction for the next school year.
Leader Academy	Assistant principals	To prepare selected assistant principals for the principalship in the district.

The central office leaders have arranged timely professional learning for principals titled

Leadership Development II. The idea behind this initiative was the monthly meetings of the

assistant principals led by the superintendent. Hopkins commented that these meetings served to

promote "strategic communications between the superintendent and assistant principals."

Through these meetings, assistant principals kept informed about the new developments in the

district, state, and the nation. The meetings in Leadership Development II were generally tied to

the meetings by cluster or by the school level that allowed assistant principals to communicate

with their peers within the district and with those working at the same school level. Therefore,

participants understood those meetings as not only a pathway to professional learning but also a

means of networking and capacity-building opportunities.

Another initiative was an annual summer leadership conference that bought together

leaders from the Illustrative County School System working on different levels. The central

office personnel placed this initiative at the center of their professional learning. Superintendent

Adams described the annual summer conference as the "key stone of all of our professional

development." The conference featured internal and external speakers and was specifically

valued by the principals for the choice of sessions provided.   Middle school principal, Shows,

stated, "Every year I think that the conference cannot get any better and yet they manage to

improve it the next year."

Finally, the most frequently referenced professional development was the Leader

Academy that served both professional learning and principal succession purposes. The

principals in the study also noted the positive changes they witnessed in their assistant principals

after they attended the Leader Academy. The Leader Academy started as an intensive training

for aspiring principals funded by a Broad Foundation grant. The application to the Academy

involved principal nomination and a screening process. The curriculum for the training was

internally developed and the content extended over several sessions mostly taught by the

superintendents and central office personnel. Central office leaders described Leader Academy

as the most successful initiative they launched while principals asserted that "Leader Academy

had been the most effective in my job change" from assistant principal to a principal.

Overall, the Illustrative County School System offered multiple professional learning opportunities for aspiring leaders. Combining school-based and system-wide initiatives, central office personnel afforded choices about professional learning for teacher leaders and assistant principals. The examination of the meanings attributed by the study participants to the different types of professional learning showed that these initiatives were strategically planned to connect professional learning to the system's strategic plan for continuity of school leadership in the district. The best example of this connection was the Leader Academy that served both professional development and succession purposes and was described by principals and central office leaders as one of the most effective and valuable professional learning opportunities offered for aspiring leaders, showing that effective principal professional learning and succession planning are strategically connected when planned by the central office leaders.

The Hiring Process: Choosing What is Best for the District

Illustrative County School System developed an elaborate principal hiring process that occurred in several stages and sought input from multiple people inside and outside the school district. The participants in this study communicated a shared meaning of the principal hiring as a "complex process" that was very lengthy and elaborate. The superintendent and the central office personnel did not believe in reputational hiring; they wanted to ensure that the best person was selected for every school in need of a principal. Brown, the associate superintendent, tied principal hiring to the overall culture of the school district. Brown explained:

> I think it has to do with the corporate culture and the idea is that you establish processes and make the selection decisions that are the best for the district, not the best for an individual. It is not about taking care about somebody's brother-in-law, it is about finding the best candidate. With the work we do, you cannot leave it to favoritism and getting somebody an easy government job.

The shared belief expressed by the participants was that principal hiring was seen as an important process due to its impact on the schools' and the district performance.

The principal hiring process had been developing over several years to take the shape it had at the time of the study. All central office leaders involved in this study communicated the same stages to selecting a principal regardless of the level of their involvement in principal selection and hiring. Principal hiring process in the Illustrative County School System involved nine major stages (see Figure 4.2).

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│     ┌───────────────────────────────────┐       │
│     │ District announces vacant principal position │
│     └───────────────────────────────────┘       │
│                      ↓                           │
│     ┌───────────────────────────────────┐       │
│     │   Applicants fill in the application forms │
│     └───────────────────────────────────┘       │
│                      ↓                           │
│     ┌───────────────────────────────────┐       │
│     │ Applicants take the Principal Insight survey │
│     └───────────────────────────────────┘       │
│                      ↓                           │
│     ┌───────────────────────────────────┐       │
│     │   The panel of the central office leaders │
│     │          screens the applicants          │
│     └───────────────────────────────────┘       │
│                      ↓                           │
│     ┌───────────────────────────────────┐       │
│     │ Interview with the Chief Human Resource Officer │
│     └───────────────────────────────────┘       │
│                      ↓                           │
│     ┌───────────────────────────────────┐       │
│     │ Recommendations sent to the Superintendent │
│     └───────────────────────────────────┘       │
│                      ↓                           │
│     ┌───────────────────────────────────┐       │
│     │   Interview with the Superintendent       │
│     └───────────────────────────────────┘       │
│                      ↓                           │
│     ┌───────────────────────────────────┐       │
│     │  Recommendations of the Superintendent    │
│     └───────────────────────────────────┘       │
│                      ↓                           │
│     ┌───────────────────────────────────┐       │
│     │  Hiring decision made by the School Board  │
│     └───────────────────────────────────┘       │
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Figure 4.2. Principal hiring process in the Illustrative County School System

Overall, principal hiring was an extended process that involved multiple screenings and interviews. In addition to the steps captured in the figure 4.2, the school district surveyed parents and the community at large to get their input regarding the person best suited to be a principal in their community. Hopkins, the executive director for leadership development explained, "We collect the survey data from parents and community and use it as an additional tool in principal selection. We try to combine all these sources to get the best person for the position."

Although individual characteristics of every school were taken into account in the hiring process, there was a set of skills, abilities, and attitudes that all principals were expected to possess to be considered for the position. Hopkins explained:

> There is a set of skills that all principals need to be able to demonstrate. Those skills include problem analysis, sensitivity, oral and written communication, judgment, organizational ability, teamwork. In addition to these skills, there is a set of attitudes or dispositions. Also, there is core knowledge in the area of legal and ethical behaviors. So, the three big areas we check are skills, attitudes and knowledge.

To assess these skills and abilities, the Illustrative County School System used the instrument that was developed by the Gallup Organization called the *Principal Insight*.

The leaders from the Illustrative County School System believed that their principal hiring instrument was comprehensive and allowed them to choose the best person for every vacant principal position in the district. The study participants acknowledged that the process still had subjective elements to it due to it being "human selection process," but they also asserted that it was very fair and conducted with the interests of the school district in mind. Long, the chief academic officer, summarized that hiring a principal "is not a decision that is taken lightly. We really take a good bit of time and input to make that decision."

All the principals in the study were first- or second-year principals; and therefore, have recently experienced this hiring process. All four principals in the study have gone through the

Leader Academy and believed it was regarded as a positive aspect of their application because it fit into the "we like to grow our own" mentality of the school district. Although principals could not clearly articulate the competencies that they were expected to possess, they believed that the process was "fair" and "comprehensive." The principals believed it was their responsibility to grow future leaders within their schools and asserted that "the sitting principal's opinion is valuable" in selecting the future principal (Eagle, high school principal). A somewhat different view was communicated by the central office participants that believed that although "it was important that they grow their teachers, but they don't need to grow their leaders specifically to replace them at that one school," as Long explained.

Principal hiring process was predominantly seen as a human resource topic that was not directly linked to principal professional learning. However, indirect links between the two aspects of the principalship were present. First, the quality of principal preparation program was discussed as an "external influence on principal selection that we can manage or control for" (Brown, associate superintendent). Second, closely linked to the formal, university-based preparation programs was the internally developed Leader Academy as the applicants' participation in this program was regarded as a requirement from the internal applicant pool for a principal position. Third, a component of principal hiring in the Illustrative County School System was taking the Principal Insight instrument that measured their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The information learned from this instrument was not only used to make hiring decisions, but also to provide the necessary support and relevant professional learning opportunities to the newly-hired principals, thus linking principal selection, hiring, socialization, support, development, and retention.

Retention and Turnover: We Anticipate Turnover, But We Are Ready For It

The Illustrative County School System tied the notion of principal turnover to leader succession planning, but attempted to mediate the negative effects of frequent changes in school leadership by providing support and needed professional learning opportunities. The overall meaning attributed to principal turnover in the school system was that of a "low turnover," typically caused by retiring decisions of those leaders who have been in the principalship for many years. The numbers of the soon-to-retire principals were carefully monitored by the central office leaders. Nicholson, the director of leadership development, shared, "we always look at the numbers of those eligible to retire; the real challenge though is the transition from the sitting principal to the person who is selected."

To help ease this transition, the Illustrative County School System developed a transition plan that heavily relied on the leader mentors that were assigned to all novice principals in the district as a non-evaluative support available to them. A middle school principal shared, "when you need them [mentors], really 24 hours, every day of the week," the mentors provide counsel on myriad facets of the position and the work of being a leader. Nicholson explained that the transition plan "looked at responsibilities of the outgoing and the new principal. Leader mentor comes in September and sits down with a new principal to outline a plan for the year." Although the leader mentor was the most valued support acknowledged by the principals, they also noted that the Leader Academy and the regular meetings served as great sources of support also. Vargas, the chief human resources officer, emphasized the need for principals' support as a form of professional development: "You've got to continuously develop leaders because you are adding new leaders. And you want leaders who are currently working in the district to have that

144

support as well." Such an approach positions professional learning as a source of continuous support to principals across their career span in the system.

Overall, the Illustrative County School System did not experience high principal turnover, even though it was acknowledged that it was higher than it used to be. Nicholson, the director for leadership development, believed that this increase was partly explained by the "increasing numbers of schools that are opened every year." The executive director for leadership development, Hopkins, although acknowledging the increase in turnover, noted that "our biggest challenge is not the turnover, but making sure that our supply chain and that our effort to ensure high quality supply chain meets demand." Such an approach shows that the leaders of the Illustrative County School System tied leader succession processes (i.e., turnover, retention) to the development of future leaders, emphasizing the interconnected nature of principal professional learning and succession in their school district.

Brown, an associate superintendent, attributed the heightened turnover to the increased mobility of people in the modern world: "we were used to people being principals for a long time and now the mobility of society and increased challenges of the principalship increased the turnover rate." Rowe, an area superintendent, elaborated on the reasons that made principals in the Illustrative County School System want to stay in their positions: "The principal is seen as the change agent, instructional leader, and the person accountable for both staff and students. We compensate principals at a very good level so it is difficult for them to leave." Similarly, the chief human resource officer, Vargas, explained:

> The retention here is built on the competitive benefit packages. In this county, we take care of our people—we are here providing support, leadership, principal development; we partner with them to make them successful. We provide staff development so they know what they are doing. We provide them with mentors. So, they hardly leave.

A firm believer in the importance of principal professional development, Vargas was quick to emphasize the strategic importance of guided professional learning to principal preparation, socialization, and retention.

Overall, the turnover of principals in the Illustrative County School System was conceptualized in terms of the inevitable retirements of the leaders from the "baby boomer" generation and to open new schools every year. Superintendent Adams positioned the experienced principals open new schools, while novices were hired to take over the established schools in the district. Central office leaders also pointed out that it was more difficult to retain good principals in lower socio-economic schools with more diverse student population, but it was not a "large" issue of concern to all of the participants in this study. The principals in the study confirmed that low turnover was also a reality in their schools—the good reputation of the school district encouraged educators to remain with the Illustrative County School System.

The analysis of principal retention and turnover that are typically regarded as human resource topics showed that professional development was closely intertwined with them. First, the idea of increased responsibilities and the challenges faced by a principal was voiced by all central office leaders. The system's responses to these challenges connected principal professional learning and succession as a way to help principals deal with these challenges. The system believed that the principals needed professional development; otherwise, the turnover rates would perhaps be higher. Second, professional learning was seen as an important part of ensuring a new principal's success. Finally, high principal retention in the Illustrative County School System was partly attributed to all of the professional learning and support opportunities provided to principals on a timely basis throughout the school year. The themes that emerged from examining professional development for sitting principals are examined next.

Professional Development for Sitting Principals: Providing Continuous Professional Development to Ensure That All Principals Succeed

The superintendent asserted that the principal was a key person to the school's success. Following his vision, the Illustrative County School System provided multiple professional development opportunities to ensure that novice and veteran principals in the district were successful (see table 4.9). Some of these initiatives were the same as those provided for aspiring leaders (i.e., summer leadership conference; area and level meetings) while others were designed specifically to meet the needs of novice and experienced principals (i.e., leader mentor program; just-in-time training).

Leaders from the Illustrative County School System communicated a broad definition of professional development that encompassed formal and informal, planned and unplanned initiatives, and programs that were provided by experts from inside and outside the school district. Principals were provided with carefully planned professional learning to "ensure their success from the first day," as stated by Vargas, the chief human resource officer. This point was seconded by the superintendent's assertion that "we cannot afford to have a new principal fail." Therefore, considerable attention was given to professional development for the new principals in the district. With several new schools opening every year, this focus was justified. A commonly shared perspective among the participants was the success of two professional initiatives provided for novice principals—the leader mentor program and the "just-in-time" training sessions.

A recently introduced leader mentor program proved to be a success from the first months of its implementation. This initiative involved retired, once successful principals as personally appointed mentors to the first- and second-year principals. Principals valued the

147

support they received from their mentors and commonly acknowledged leader mentors as "the best and most helpful" professional development and support they received. The elementary school principal, Salton, offered, "the best support that I have, the life saving thing, is my mentor who is a retired principal from Illustrative County. She [the mentor] knows the system, is well respected, and I completely trust her judgment."

Table 4.9

Illustrative County School System Professional Development for Sitting Principals

Initiative	Targeted Audience	Purpose
Leader Mentor Program	New principals	To support and coach new principals in their first two years in the seat.
Just-in-time training	Principals	To provide principals with the specific training needed during the school year.
Area and School Level Meetings	Assistant principals and principals	To develop skills and awareness related to the assistant principals' responsibilities.
Leadership Development I	Principals	To update about the directions of the district and the state.
Summer Leadership Conference	Assistant principals and principals	To outline the system's direction for the next school year.

The principals valued the nonjudgmental feedback, expert advice, and the availability of their mentors when they needed them most. A middle school principal, Timpson, shared that his mentor told him, "I am available to you. There is no time of the day or day of the week that you cannot call me if you need me. Here is my cell phone, my home phone, my work phone. I'm available." A leader mentor was considered a safe person to ask for advice. A high school principal, Eagle, stated, "Any issues I have I can discuss with her [the mentor] completely

confidentially, they do not go beyond this office." The central office leaders saw the benefits of this mentorship program and were seeking resources to further extend it.

The "just-in-time" training was originally developed for novice principals, providing training on topics that were needed at different times of the year. However, these sessions were also open to all principals who wanted to refresh their knowledge in regard to a specific topic covered in the training session (i.e., budget, teacher evaluation, etc.). Vargas explained, "These sessions are based on the identified need they have. It is about once a month and we try to attach them to other meetings we do." The value of these sessions was in the fact that they were built based on the principals' input to meet their needs, not imposed on them by the central office leaders who planned professional learning.

All principals in the district were engaged in the ongoing monthly meetings called Leadership Development I that was aimed at the continuous quality improvement of sitting leaders. Hopkins, the executive director for leadership development, explained the philosophy behind this initiative: "during these meetings, principals receive strategic communication from the superintendent and central office personnel and then we do small break-out sessions where they have the opportunity to apply what they learned." Salton, the elementary school principal, shared, "Those meetings are about 'nuts and bolts.' They are about what is coming down and what to expect about the things we need to know." These meetings served multiple purposes as principals were able to stay updated, grow professionally, and reconnect with other leaders in their system on a regular basis. A middle school principal, Timpson, shared that these meetings helped him combat isolation: "I have relationships with other principals here. I'm not here alone. I don't feel isolated. I don't feel cut off."

Additionally, leaders at different levels were involved in the annual summer leadership conference. Vargas explained:

> The conference is so effective because of the quality and the amount of planning and the input of all those involved in it. Every leader has an opportunity to be involved in it. It sets the direction for the year—it turns vision into reality. It is an opportunity for leaders to come together and to focus on what we are doing.

The summer leadership conference was directly tied to the professional development plan for the year and to the district's leader succession plan allowing for further communication among aspiring leaders and sitting leaders at all levels.

In summary, professional learning for sitting principals in the Illustrative County School System was directed by a central office division titled Leadership Development. However, principal professional development was also impacted by the decisions of other central office divisions; specifically, the division for teaching and learning and the division of human resources. Such a shared approach to providing principal professional development connected professional learning to other leadership-related processes, such as principal socialization, support, evaluation, retention, and succession.

Principal Succession: We do Not Leave it to Chance

Principal succession in the district was viewed as central to the schools' and district effectiveness and success. Such an approach to principal succession was relatively recent, although the district developed processes and procedures to ensure smooth principal transition from one position to another. Nicholson, the director of leadership development, stated:

> We are really looking at the supply and demand, not just waiting until the demand shows itself. It is really important to look ahead, find people, and prepare right people so that we are not caught off guard. I really think that school systems are really now just beginning to look at that whereas the private sector has looked at it for years.

Succession planning was not a new concept to the Illustrative County School System, and leaders at all levels shared that it is a process that was important to everyone; and therefore, should be everybody's concern. To this extent, Vargas, the chief human resources officer, explained the need for promoting shared ownership of principal succession in the district: "Our principals see the need for succession plan, but they don't have the ownership of the process that I would like them to have."

The principals in the study shared a common understanding of leader succession as a "way to ensure principal quality" in the district. When asked about the leader succession plan, principals named the central office leaders involved in the process and directed the inquiries to the directors of the divisions. Although the principals noted that they had a chance to recommend their aspiring leaders for the leadership positions in the district, they also asserted that "the schools should be used a bit more as a resource" in the overall process of leader succession planning.

Illustrative County School System did not have a formal principal succession plan. However, the participants shared a conviction that it was important for a district to have such a plan and believed that it would be developed in the future to guide the process of principal replacement. Brown, an associate superintendent, stated: "We should make the process more formal, involve more people. I think every principal should try to orchestrate their successor. It is every leader's job to be thinking about and preparing for succession." Such an approach to principal succession necessitated that principals (at the school level) and central office leaders (at the district level) provide targeted and ongoing professional development for aspiring leaders in an attempt to 'orchestrate' leader succession.

Another meaning that emerged in relation to principal succession planning was considerable time and effort that should be invested in this process. The succession plan was conceptualized as a database including the employee data, forecasted student enrollment, forecasted staffing needs, and projected retirement data. Hopkins, the executive director for leadership development, asserted, "It's more than just talking. It is a lot of planning. It is a lot of data to be collected and analyzed."

In summary, principal succession was an area of interest and concern to the leaders of the district. The common meaning was that "It is every leader's job to be thinking about and preparing for succession." The overall importance of leader succession was emphasized by the superintendent who shared: "You have to prepare for the future. You cannot just leave succession planning to chance." In the descriptions of the principal succession process, the link between professional development and succession was especially clear when the participants described these processes and compared those responsible for planning and overseeing these processes in the district.

Planning Principal Professional Learning and Succession: We Are All Responsible

Illustrative County School System adopted a collaborative approach to planning principal professional learning and succession. Because the culture of the district was based on the belief that everyone was responsible for the schools' success, the participants expressed similar ideas of shared responsibility for the success of the district principals as defined by the professional development and succession planning for school leadership. The Illustrative County School System participants attributed similar meanings to planning principal professional learning (i.e., a team approach, a shared responsibility) and principal succession planning (i.e., a joint effort, all of us are responsible).

Although the Illustrative County School System embraced the approach "we are all responsible," the district had a team of leaders formally responsible to avoid the trap of "when everyone is responsible then no one is responsible" as explained by Brown, the associate superintendent. Brown further asserted that "there needs to be a strategic person overseeing that in collaboration with other divisions. You cannot go forward unless you have structure in place and we've had a very clear collaboration here."

A collaborative approach to principal professional learning was orchestrated by the superintendent and his cabinet but allowed for the input from principals, school board members, and the central office personnel. Initially, the school board sets the direction for the district and directly communicates with the superintendent. Long, the chief academic officer, explained the role of the superintendent in the process in the following way, "Our superintendent would be the first piece of that [professional development planning]. He sets the vision and direction and works with strategic goals and initiatives." The superintendent's vision was furthered by the planning team informally called 'the leadership development council' consisting of the chief academic officer, the chief human resource officer, and the chief director of leadership development. These leaders were also responsible for providing professional learning for sitting and aspiring principals and effectively combining internally and externally provided professional development that best suited the leaders' needs.

Principal succession planning in the Illustrative County School System was following a very similar scenario. The board members shared ideas with the superintendent who was overseeing the process and was credited with specifically attending to the issues surrounding principal succession in the district. Brown, an associate superintendent, described superintendent Adams as "a very strong visionary leader who placed the leader succession [in the district] at the

forefront of his efforts." The superintendent was then communicating with the cabinet that included the heads of the division. The cabinet members, in turn, sought after the input from the sitting leaders. Therefore, principal professional learning and succession in the Illustrative County School System were orchestrated by the same people and followed the same overall model (see Figure 4.3)

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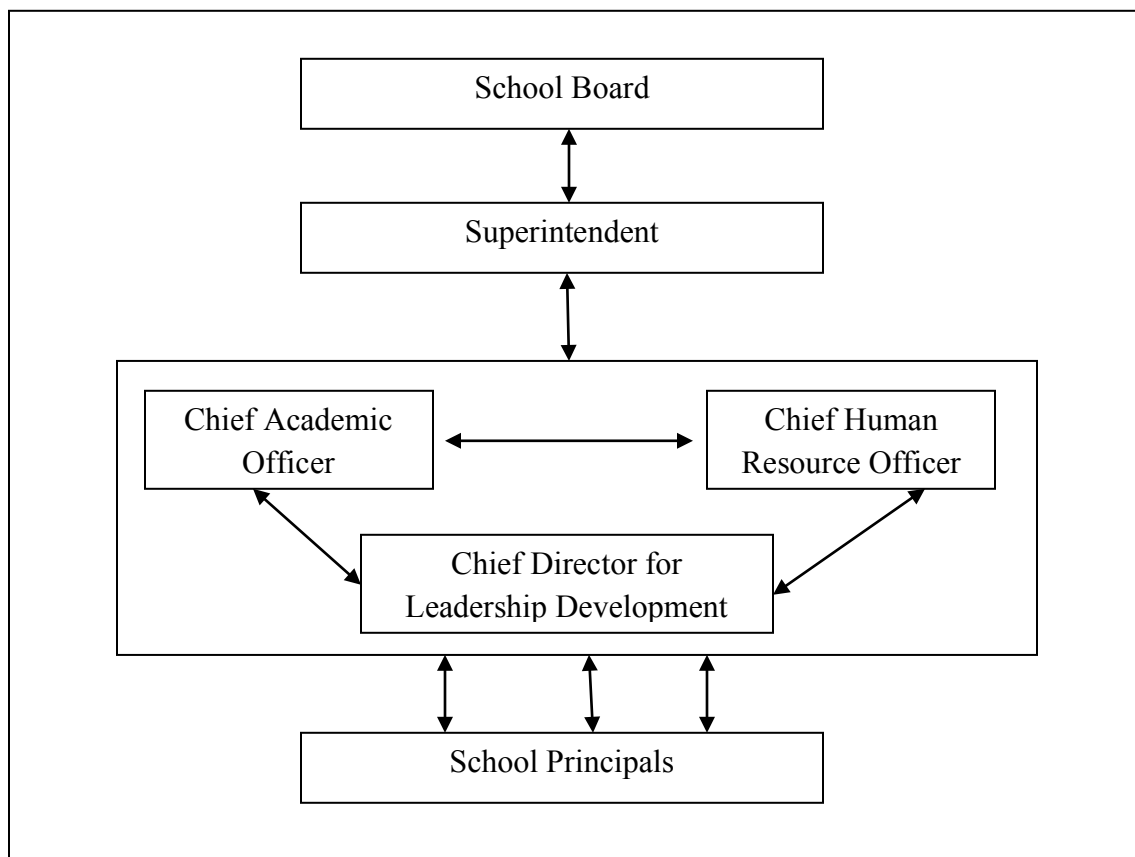
Figure 4.3. Principal Professional Development and Succession Planning in the Illustrative County School System

Although principal succession planning was conceptualized as a responsibility of the central office personnel, principals were expected to partake in this process. Brown explained,

"If a good principal cares deeply about his or her school, they should be thinking about succession. … It is every leader's job to be thinking about and preparing for succession."

Hopkins, the executive director for leadership development, shared a similar opinion:

> [In principal succession planning] I would include anyone who is involved in the day-to-day part of the ongoing operations in schools, whether it is an area superintendent or a principal. I think people who are closer to the ground may have a better hand of that community, and of what the school and children in a particular area need. I think the involvement of those people in critical.

Similarly, the chief human resources officer, Vargas, stated that "we are dependent on principals to grow assistant principals and recommend them for the Leader Academy." This assertion was also expressed by the superintendent who emphasized the importance of sitting principals to the future of leadership in the district. The principals in the study attributed similar meanings to principal succession in that they believed they were responsible for developing their teacher leaders and assistant principals to ensure leadership continuity in the district.

The comparison of the process and the key leaders involved in planning principal professional development and succession in the Illustrative County School System revealed close connections between these two phenomena related to the principalship. The Illustrative County School System placed importance on both processes and involved the same leadership team to address principal professional development and succession. Such an approach showed that principal professional development and succession were closely related and suggested that this school district viewed each of them in close relation to the other.

Principal Professional Learning and Succession: Closely Intertwined

The analysis of the data from the Illustrative County School System participants revealed that principal professional learning and succession were closely connected in the district. The acknowledged need for strategic succession planning accentuated the need for strategic

professional learning. Furthermore, professional learning was found to be an inseparable part of major components of principal succession to be able to: (1) enhance the applicant pool; (2) increase principal retention; (3) minimize leader turnover; and, (4) plan for principal succession. The examination of the meanings attributed by the Illustrative County School System participants to practices and processes accompanying principal professional learning and succession revealed four major themes connecting these two phenomena in the district:

1. Professional learning is a pathway to a stronger and broader applicant pool;

2. Targeted and carefully planned professional learning increases principal retention;

3. Ongoing professional development for leaders at different career stages minimized principal turnover, and,

4. In the Illustrative County School System, planning of principal professional learning and succession planning are done by the same leadership team, connecting the two phenomena at the level of planning and enactment.

These themes are briefly elaborated below.

First, the Illustrative County School System positioned professional learning as a pathway to a stronger and broader applicant pool. Central office leaders attributed the meaning of the strategic need driving professional development planning in the district. The superintendent emphasized the need of developing future leaders and connected the notions of professional learning and succession on the example of the Teachers as Leaders program. Adams shared, "The purpose of Teachers as Leaders program is to provide professional development. We don't necessarily look at it as a succession strategy although it may lead to succession." Assistant superintendent Brown noted that "the strategic need and anticipating

156

potential retirements and vacancies were driving the strategy for putting together a development program [Leader Academy] for assistant principals."

Nicholson, the director of leadership development, noted the similar trend in the professional development provided for aspiring and sitting leaders and stated, "We use the resources [to provide professional development] for principals and assistant principals. We are all developing leaders. That is certainly a part of the training—looking ahead." By providing strategic professional development for aspiring leaders, the Illustrative County School System aimed to grow a broader and stronger applicant pool of future leaders.

Second, the Illustrative County School System provided carefully planned professional learning to increase principal retention. In addition to its direct goal of broadening principals' knowledge, skills, and abilities, professional development in the district served another important goal—increasing principal retention by ensuring that principals are successful as the leaders of their schools. Vargas, the chief human resources officer, shared:

> That is why we've had few principals to really fail. It has been because of the resources, support, development, and the trainings that are job-embedded. We emphasize the real job-embedded kind of development that people need in order to build that capacity on the job, the capacity to do what needs to be done [to succeed].

Carefully selected professional development helped principals to deepen their knowledge and hone their skills in those areas they needed improvement and fostered their success in the position, thus increasing leader retention.

Third, the Illustrative County School System participants believed that ongoing professional learning for leaders at different career stages minimized principal turnover. Related to the previous theme, principal turnover was also directly linked to professional development. Assistant superintendent Brown asserted that professional learning and succession "are interwoven; it is all part of the succession plan: socialization, support, development. … If you are

157

not monitoring these carefully, you will have some crisis issue, you will have turnover." The Illustrative County School System participants took pride in their system and in the continuous professional learning it provided for sitting and aspiring leaders, which in turn, minimized principal turnover in the district.

Finally, the Illustrative County School System connected principal professional learning and succession planning at the level of planning and enactment because both processes were overseen by the same leadership cabinet. Vargas, the chief human resources officer, shared" "Here in Illustrative County, human resources department deal with recruitment and selection of personnel. Also, we are very much involved in professional development of personnel. In other districts these functions may be separated but here they are connected." This opinion was communicated by other participants who articulated that the same leadership team was responsible for planning principal professional development and succession. This finding shows that although the Illustrative County School System was large and that many subdivisions existed at the central office level, these divisions worked closely together to address issues related to principal professional development and succession, thus connecting these phenomena.

The next chapter provides the analysis of principal professional learning and succession planning in the Remote County School System. The themes that emerged in relation to seven topics connecting professional learning and succession of school principals (the applicant pool; professional development for aspiring leaders; the hiring process; retention and turnover of leaders; professional development for sitting principals; principal succession process; and planning of principal professional development and succession) are presented. Finally, the overarching themes connecting principal professional development and succession in the context of this district are provided.

CHAPTER 5

REMOTE COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM—A CASE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the connections between principal succession and professional learning through the analysis of the current practices in leader identification, development, support, and retention in two Georgia school districts. This study situated professional development in the context of principal succession. Three major aspects of this topic were targeted: professional development provided for current administrators; professional learning as an instrument for preparing prospective school leaders; and the relationship between professional development and principal succession.

To address the research questions, the researcher sought to understand the building level and central office leaders' experiences of and perspectives about leader succession and professional development provided for current and aspiring principals. This chapter focused on the context of the smaller school system in the study—the Remote County School System—and analyzed the connections between principal development and succession planning based on the experiences of and beliefs about these phenomena provided by the principals, central office leaders, and the superintendent. In this chapter, examined are the themes that emerged in the process of thematic analysis of the interview and documentary data from the Remote County School System. To comply with the requirements of the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB), the system and the participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The references to the county and school system websites were also pseudonymized accordingly.

Remote County Context

The Remote County School System is located in the southeastern part of Georgia occupying 902.29 square miles and is known for its natural habitat. Created in 1824, Remote County started as a county famous for its lumber industry (Remote County Government, n.d.). The opening of the railroad in the 1870s turned the county into a major transportation hub. The population of the county has been growing over the last decade. The estimated total population of 35,831 in 2007 increased to 36,312 in 2010 (U. S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Overall, the Census registered a 2.3% population increase in Remote County over the course of the last decade (2000-2010). According to the 2010 U.S. Census data, in 2010 the population was predominantly white (66.4%) and black (29.5%), while other races accounted only for about 4% of the total population. From the total population, 24.5% were under 18 years old and 15.7% were 65 years old and over. From the persons aged 25 and over, 78.9% graduated from high school and 11.8% had a bachelor's or higher degree (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Both of these numbers were lower than the respective percentages for the state. Per capita income ($17,416) and median household income ($31,004) were also lower in the Remote county than those in the state ($25,098 and $47,479, respectively) (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

School System Context

Remote County School System aimed to successfully educate all children; create the culture of success, credibility, accountability, and trust for students, parents, and staff; provide clean and safe educational facilities; and to provide fiscal accountability to Remote County citizens (Remote County School System, n.d.). The mission of the Remote County School System focused on providing all students with superior instruction, resources, environment, and guidance to prepare responsible graduates with life-long learning skills.
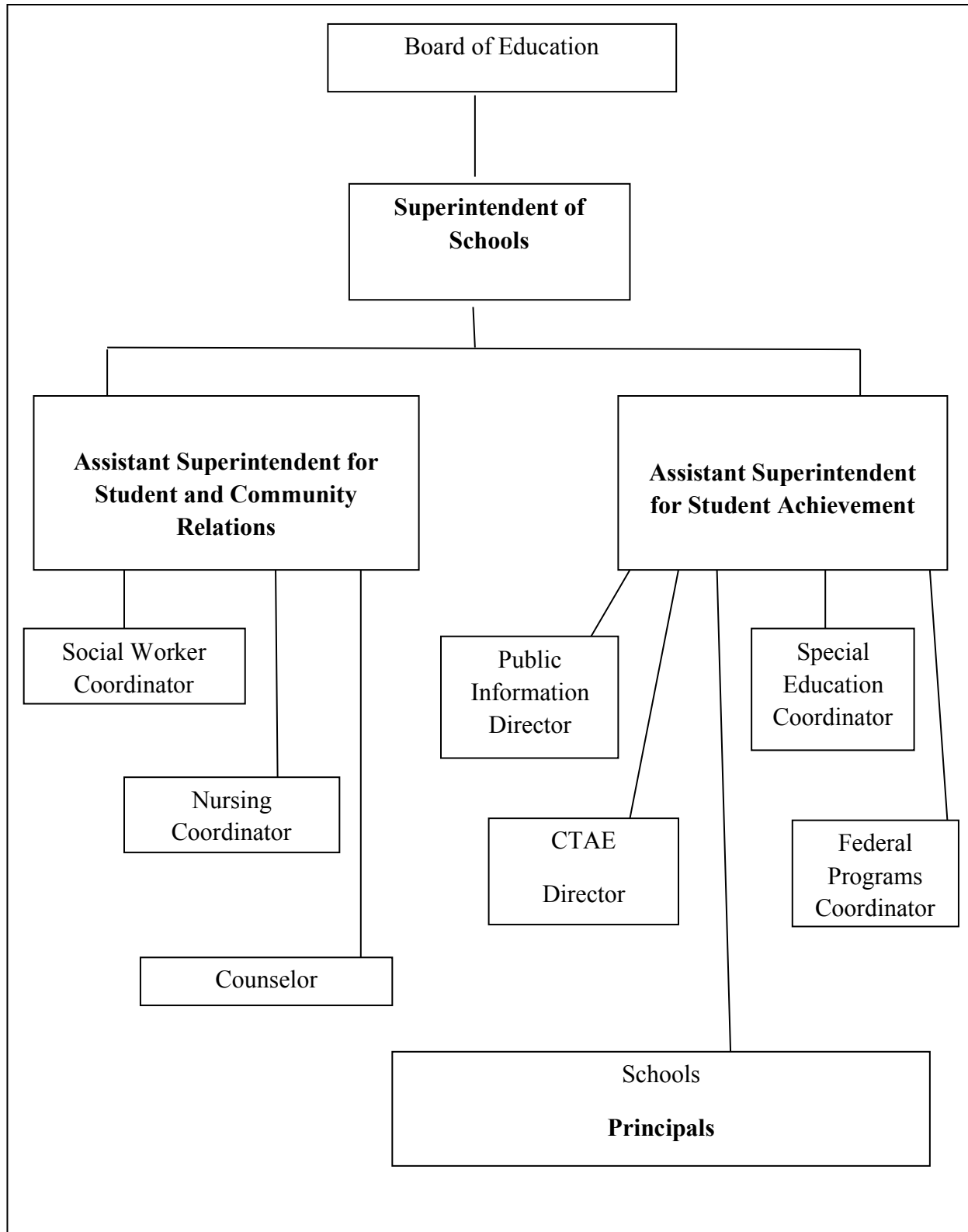
Figure 5.1. Organizational Flowchart of the Remote County School System

At the time of the study, there were 12 schools in the Remote County School System: 1 preschool, 6 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, a high school, a magnet school, and a learning center. No new schools were planned to be opened in the forthcoming years as the district did not expect considerable changes in student population. The district served 5757 students in the 2008-2009 school year. The elementary schools were feeding two middle schools that in turn, sent student to the only high school in the district.

The organizational structure of the Remote County School System represented the typical governance of the small school district. The superintendent reported to the board of education and oversaw two major divisions directed by the assistant superintendents—the division of student achievement and the division of student and community relations (see Figure 5.1). Each of the assistant superintendents worked with several major subdivisions. The principals reported to the assistant superintendent for student achievement. Even though the organizational chart of the school system did not show a direct link between the superintendent and school principals, there was close and frequent communications between them due to the small size of the district.

Table 5.1

School District Certified Personnel Years of Experience Breakdown by Type

	Administrators (as % of staff)	Support Personnel (as % of staff)	PK-12 Teachers (as % of staff)
Remote County	22.93 (7.3%)	15.72 (8.4%)	14.55 (84.3%)
State Average	19.93 (6.3%)	15.41 (8.4%)	12.25 (85.3%)

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

162

Staff profile. At the time of data collection (2008-2009), the Remote County School System employed 57 administrators (9.1%), 53 support personnel (9.3%), and 456 teachers (81.6%). The staff of the Remote County School System had an average of about 23 years of experience for administrators, about 14.5 years of experience for teachers, and about 23 years of experience for support personnel. These numbers were higher than the state averages (see Table 5.1).

The ratios of the certified personnel in the Remote County School System were generally lower than those reported for the state of Georgia, except in the teacher to support personnel ratio that was 10:1 both in the system and in the state (see Table 5.2). The teacher to administrator ration was 12:1; the student to teacher ratio was 13:1; and the teacher to staff ratio was 5:1.

Table 5.2

School District Certified Personnel Position Ratios Breakdown by Type

	Teacher: Administrator	Teacher: Support Personnel	Teacher: Staff	Student: Teacher
Remote County	12:1	10:1	5:1	13:1
State Average	14:1	10:1	6:1	14:1

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

Student profile. At the time of this study, Remote County School System enrolled 5757 students. The large student groups were white (57%) and black (37%), followed by Hispanic (3%), multiracial (2%), and Asian (1%). These numbers differed considerably from the state averages; in particular, Remote County School System served a higher percentage of white students and much lower number of Hispanic students (see Table 5.3).

163

Table 5.3

Student Population Racial Breakdown

	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Native American	White	Multiracial
Remote County	1	37	3	0	57	2
State Average	3	38	10	0	46	3

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

Remote County School System also differed in the percentages of students receiving special education services (see Table 5.4). Overall, the system enrolled higher percentages of students in special education programs, gifted education programs, and in the vocational labs but a smaller percentage of students in the alternative programs as compared to the state of Georgia.

Table 5.4

Percent of Students in Special Programs

	Special Education (K-12)	Gifted (K-12)	Vocational Labs (9-12)	Alternative Programs (K-12)
Remote County	13.1	13.6	64.7	0.9
State Average	11.2	9.0	54.7	1.9

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

Student performance profile. For the last six academic years, Remote County School System did not meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The success of the system fluctuated between 80% and 90% of the schools making AYP in the last six years (see Table 5.5).

Table 5.5

System AYP Information (2005-2010)

Year	System	Remote County School System	State of Georgia
2010	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	80.0%	77.4%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	8 (10)	1718 (2221)
2009	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	90.0%	86.0%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	9 (10)	1867 (2172)
2008	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	80.0%	79.9%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	8 (10)	1721 (2153)
2007	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	90.0	82.2%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	9 (10)	1726 (2100)
2006	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	90.0%	79.3%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	9 (10)	1642 (2071)
2005	System AYP	No	No
	% Schools Meeting AYP	80.0%	81.9%
	N of Schools Meeting AYP	8 (10)	1670 (2040)

(Georgia State Department of Education, n.d.)

As compared to the state's progress toward meeting the benchmarks, the progress of the

Remote County School System was slightly better for all the years except 2005 when the state

percentage was higher. The indicators of student achievement were slightly lower in the Remote

County School System as compared to the state percentages (see Table 5.6).

Table 5.6

Student Achievement

	% Students Take SAT	Average Comp. SAT Score	% Students Take AP Exams	AP Exams Scores 3 or Higher	% HOPE Scholarship Eligibility	Grad. Rates	Dropout Rates Grades 7-12	Dropout Rates Grades 9-12
Remote County	52.2	1424	2.6	57.4	47.6	63.3	4.8	7.0
State Average	55.7	1477	8.6	52.7	38.5	75.4	2.6	3.6

(Georgia Department of Education, n.d.)

The average Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score of 1424 was lower in the district than

the state score of 1477.   Similarly, the Remote County School System had lower graduation

rates and higher dropout rates than the state (see Table 5.6). However, the Remote County

School System had higher percentages of students taking advance placement exams and students

eligible for the Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) scholarship.

Remote County School System Participant Profiles

In this study, the Remote County School System was represented by seven participants

from the central office (three participants) and the building level leadership (four participants).

The central office participants were purposefully selected to meet the goals of the study: the

166

superintendent, the assistant superintendent for student achievement, and the director of human resources. The principals were selected and recommended by the superintendent as those who could provide the richest data on the topic. There were three male and four female participants (see Table 5.7).

Table 5.7

Participant Data

Name	Title	Highest Degree	Years in Position	Years in Admin.	Years in Ed.
Eric Atkins	Superintendent	Ed.D.	3	21	28
Susan Norris	Assistant Superintendent	Ed.D.	3	12	22
Barbara Jones	Director of Human Resources	Ed.D.	2	5	26
John Riddle	High School Principal	Ed.S.	3	6	13
David Taylor	Middle School Principal	M.S.	2	6	22
Jenna Martinez	Elementary Principal	Ed.D.	< 1	3	13
Lana Lewis	Elementary Principal	Ed.D.	7	7	36

Five participants had doctoral degrees, one had a specialist degree, and one had master's degree as the highest educational degree. The total number of years in education varied from 13 years (elementary and high school principals) to 36 years (elementary school principal). The novice elementary school principal had the lowest number of years in administration (three), while the superintendent served in educational administration positions for the highest number of years (21). Except for the veteran elementary school principal that has been in her position for seven years, all other participants have served in their positions less than three years.

Dr. Eric Atkins, Superintendent. Dr. Atkins started teaching and coaching in the middle school in 1980 and later taught and coached at the high school. Having "loved teaching," Dr. Atkins decided to pursue educational administration. Therefore, he pursued a master's degree in Education with some courses in leadership and later a doctorate in Educational Leadership. Dr. Atkins' career in educational leadership started with an assistant principalship in an elementary school. In that position, he was mentored by his principal and after two years, he self-described as being "ready to be a principal on my own." Then, Dr. Atkins served as an elementary school principal for 4 years, a principal of an intermediate school for 2 years, and a high school principal for 11 years. Following this administrative experience, Dr. Atkins became the superintendent of the Remote County School System and was in the third year of the superintendency at the time of this study.

Reflecting on the role of a principal, Dr. Atkins asserted that "the work has changed significantly." Dr. Atkins noted the change was the movement from being a manager to being an instructional leader, and he shared that the Remote County School System focused on the instructional leadership roles and responsibilities to ensure principals' success. Dr. Atkins reflected on these changes:

> Our veteran principals were overwhelmed about some of the things that we were asking them to do, but now everything is clear. The pieces of the puzzle were coming together. And, consequently, they are very much on board with what we are trying to do for the district. A lot of changes have taken place; a lot of best practices have been looked at and have been implemented. Consequently, we have grown as a district, not just with our new people, but with staff that has been in place for quite some time.

Dr. Atkins believed that all principals, new and experienced, needed help and assistance and saw it as his responsibility to provide that assistance to bring all the district's leaders to "the same page" in regard to the district's vision, mission, and goals.

Dr. Susan Norris, Assistant Superintendent for Student Achievement. Dr. Norris has worked in education for 22 years serving in multiple roles—a teacher, an assistant principal, an instructional coach, curriculum direction, and a principal of an elementary, a middle, and a high schools. Although she worked in different school districts, all of them were located in Georgia. Dr. Norris believed that the different positions that she served in provided her with a broader view of education. Norris shared, "I had the advantage in that experience of seeing the broad range of learning that students encounter as they move through the progression of their educational career." Following, Dr. Norris served as a director for student achievement before being promoted to the position of an assistant superintendent. At the time of this study, Dr. Norris was in the third year of being an assistant superintendent for student achievement.

Looking back on her career path, Dr. Norris reflected about learning from people she has been working with and shared:

> If I could name one thing that shaped the leader that I have become, it would be individuals that I have had an opportunity to work with, both positively and those that weren't quite as successful in their own practice. I think you learn from individuals that you have an opportunity to work with things that you wouldn't want to repeat. And you learn things that you would absolutely like to emulate in your own practice. So, the experiences, both good and bad, have really shaped what I believe about leadership today.

Dr. Norris spoke highly of the superintendent's vision, and she believed that it was her job to support the ideas and initiatives of Dr. Atkins.

Dr. Barbara Jones, Director of Human Resources. Dr. Jones started her educational career as a school teacher in an elementary school where she worked for 15 years. Following teaching in a school, Dr. Jones worked in technical colleges where she served as the director of technical instruction and the vice president for student services. After that, Dr. Jones went back to public education and worked as a vocational supervisor and a principal of a high school. Two

years before this study, Dr. Jones was appointed as a director of human resources in Remote County that allowed her "to come back home" to the county she was originally from.

Looking forward to the future development of the Remote County School System, Dr. Jones shared:

> I think we're going to continue to have a change in student demographics. In the last 10 years we've had a higher concentration of minority and poverty kids, and I think that trend is probably going to continue. And you've got those same teachers, a lot of them have been there for 20 something years, and they really have trouble identifying and working with those kids, and so that passes along to the principal to solve.

Dr. Jones believed that the district provided multiple forms of support for their principals to be successful in their positions, and she took pride in the initiatives offered over the last three years that she has been in her central office position.

Mr. John Riddle, Remote County High School Principal. Mr. Riddle was in the third year of being a high school principal in the Remote County School System at the time of the study. His experience of working in this school district was limited to serving as a principal. Prior to this, Mr. Riddle had worked in different counties across Georgia as a teacher, a coach, and an administrative assistant for 10 years. Looking back at his coaching experiences, Mr. Riddle believed he was a good coach, was glad that he had experienced working in multiple districts, and asserted that a good principal was both a good manager and the instructional leader of the school. Mr. Riddle acknowledged the multiple challenges faced by the teachers and administrators in the accountability era and believed that it was his job to provide support for his staff to be able "to move this school to be the best school in the state."

At the time of this study, Remote County High School served 1430 students (56% of them were disadvantaged and 12% were students with disabilities). The student population was predominantly white (55%), while other racial/ethnic groups were black (43%), Asian (1%),

170

Hispanic (10%), and multiracial (1%). These percentages were similar to the overall district percentages of students by race/ethnicity. In addition, about 10% of the students were in gifted programs, 55.5% attended vocational labs, and 2% were enrolled in alternative programs. Remote County High School did not meet AYP in any year from 2003 to 2011.

Mr. David Taylor, Crossroad Middle School Principal. Mr. Taylor was in the second year of serving as a middle school principal at the time of this study. With 22 year of educational experience, Mr. Taylor believed he had a chance to experience multiple changes that have occurred to educational positions over time. Mr. Taylor served for 16 years as a teacher and a coach and did not have leadership aspirations for a long time. However, with the encouragement from the superintendent and being inspired by his successful coaching career, Mr. Taylor assumed the principalship. At the time of the study, Mr. Taylor was struggling with managing and leading a large staff and with balancing his work, family, and doctoral program work. In one of the recent years, Mr. Taylor was named a Georgia's middle school principal of the year.

At the time of the study, Crossroad Middle School served 536 students (60% economically disadvantaged students; 14% students with disabilities). From the total student population, 14.4% were enrolled in special education programs; 0.2% were English language learners; and 8.8% were receiving remedial education. The school employed 5 administrators, 8 support personnel, and 49 teachers. The Crossroad Middle School met AYP every year from 2003 to 2011.

Dr. Jenna Martinez, Frontal Elementary School Principal. Dr. Martinez was a first-year principal of the Frontal Elementary School at the time of the study. Having spent all 13 years of her educational career in the Remote County School System, Dr. Martinez believed that

171

she knew the district really well to become a successful principal. As a novice principal, Dr. Martinez felt supported by her staff, peers, and the central office leader, and she believed that the targeted professional learning she was receiving would help her to be successful in the principal's seat.

At the time of the study, Frontal Elementary School served 439 students (74% economically disadvantaged; 10% students with disabilities; 1% English language learners). From the total population, 9.6% were special education students and 13.9% were enrolled in the early intervention programs. The student population was predominantly black (54%) and white (38%), with Asian (2%), Hispanic (3%), and multiracial (3%) ethnic groups accounting for small fractions of the overall student body. Frontal Elementary School employed 2 administrators, 4 support personnel, and 45 teachers. The school made AYP every year from 2003 till 2011.

Dr. Lana Lewis, Southwest Elementary School Principal. Dr. Lewis was the most senior participant among the Remote County School System leaders participating in this study. At the time of the data collection, Dr. Lewis has worked in education for 36 years; 7 of these years were spent in her current position of a principal of the Southwest Elementary School. Dr. Lewis was a big supporter of job-embedded learning and asserted "you just learn by doing." Dr. Lewis believed that every district should grow their own leaders and provide mentorship for their novice principals. Dr Lewis mentored and supported the aspiring leaders within her school.

Southwest Elementary School Principal served 350 students at the time of this study (72% economically disadvantaged; 13% students with disabilities; 1% English language learners). The student population was predominantly white (59%) and black (36%); other student subgroups included Hispanic (1%), Native American (1%), and multiracial (4%). From the total population, 13.4% were special education students and 15.1% were enrolled in the early

172

intervention program. The school employed 36 teachers, 4 support personnel, and 1

administrator. Southwest Elementary School made AYP every year from 2003 to 2011.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principal professional

learning and succession. To explore the connections between these two phenomena related to

educational administration, seven topics connecting professional learning and succession of

school principals were examined: the applicant pool; professional development for aspiring

leaders; the hiring process; retention and turnover of leaders; professional development for

sitting principals; principal succession process; and planning of principal professional

development and succession. Analysis of the interview and documentary data revealed major

themes within each of these topics that are presented next.

The Applicant Pool: Younger, Stronger, and Better Prepared than Before

Because the Remote County School System has been quite stable in terms of student

populations over the last decade (the number of schools in the district (10) was the same for the

last several years) and the leader turnover was low, district leaders were not attempting to grow

the leader applicant pool. However, the leadership positions were advertised in the state and

beyond to attract multiple applicants. In addition to the regular job fairs, local postings, and

advertising 'by word of mouth,' the Remote County School System posted the available

vacancies on the Teach Georgia website and advertised them in nearby universities.

Although the positions were also available to applicants from outside-of-the-state, the

district leaders expressed a realistic picture of their system not being the most attractive to those

coming to Georgia from outside of the state. Dr. Jones, the director of human resources, shared,

173

"People do not automatically think that going to Georgia is going to the Remote County. They think about going somewhere closer to Atlanta."

In spite of the fact that the district did not do extensive advertising for open leadership positions, the common belief expressed by the participants was that the leader applicant pool was strong. Among the trends contributing to strengthening the applicant pool were younger applicants that had stronger leadership preparation, higher educational degrees, and were more prepared to be effective in the accountability era than the applicants from the last decade that were new to the standards and the demands of the high-stakes environment. Mr. Taylor, the middle school principal, explained, "As time passes, the pool is more comfortable with the standards-based instruction, AYP, and the No Child Left Behind."

The director of human resources, Dr. Jones, described the trends in the leader applicant pool that she has witnessed over the years:

> The applicants are younger and younger. They seem very confident, even if they are classroom teachers, that they can be a principal without going through the assistant principalship. A lot of them have doctorate degrees in educational leadership. I also see more diversity in their applications.

These overall trends in leader applicant pool were also confirmed by other participants who asserted that these characteristics made the pool deeper and stronger.

Current applicants for leadership positions were believed to be better prepared not only because more aspiring leaders have already obtained leadership certifications, but also because they had experienced relevant school-based professional learning and participated in the initiatives provided by the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI). Dr. Lewis, the veteran elementary school principal, made the following observation, "The applicant pool is strong because in the last 10 years we pushed for aspiring leaders to go through leadership training programs, offered funding to participate in these programs."

The downside to this proactive planning was the fact that the district had limited leadership positions with low leader turnover that resulted in promising aspiring leaders' leaving the district to assume leadership positions elsewhere. Dr. Martinez, the novice elementary school principal, noted, "if you are a young aspiring leader [in the Remote County], you know that the next principal will retire in 12 years and the opportunity is not there [and so] a lot of aspiring administrators go to surrounding counties."

The initiatives offered by GLISI were seen as important in preparing future leaders. A graduate of the GLISI's Rising Stars leader preparation program, Dr. Martinez asserted, "The applicant pool is strong as many applicants experienced GLISI training on duties and responsibilities that every assistant principal and principal should do." Although participation in the GLISI training was not regarded as a requirement to be appointed a principal in the Remote County School System, the district leaders believed it was useful and beneficial in preparing future leaders.

An interesting finding in relation to the applicant pool was the consideration of the internal and external applicants. Overall, although external applicants were welcomed, there was a strong preference expressed for internal applicants. The acknowledged reason for this preference was that typically internal applicants were stronger and knew the realities and requirements of the district. The unacknowledged (although indirectly expressed) reason was that the district has practiced internal hiring based on the "good old boy" approach for many years in the past and therefore, it was regarded as the norm. The participants shared that previously practiced leader hiring was the superintendent's selection of someone in the district. The director of human resources, Dr. Jones, explained, "Looking back over time, there was never an issue of people applying for principal jobs. Before, the superintendent would approach

someone in the district asking if they would be interested in the job." This practice was eliminated when the current superintendent assumed his post (three years before this study).

Among the first decisions in the post, Dr. Atkins hired several leaders from outside the district, and initially these decisions were opposed by the school district, and particularly by those who wanted to be appointed for these positions. The director of human resources, Dr. Jones, shared, "When Dr. Atkins got here, the first four hires were out of town and the locals did not want to apply afterwards. That alienated people." At the time of the study, the district became accustomed to the superintendent's vision and practices, but those participants who have worked in the district for many years and were locals to the county still regarded those external hires as 'outsiders.'

The superintendent acknowledged that he hired several 'outsiders' for the district leadership positions, but asserted that he was looking for the best fit. Dr. Atkins explained:

> We needed a different approach [to hiring]. A lot of time real changes come from the outside. It was not easy [here] because of the power-play, and the connections, and a small community. Everyone knows everyone, you are related to people, and so you play safer, closer to the vest. And then there have been practices that have been done for a very long time.

Dr. Atkins acknowledged that initially he experienced the pushback, but at the time of this study, there was more understanding and tolerance toward the decisions made by the superintendent, an outsider.

However, Dr. Atkins noted that "our strongest applicants are by far our internal candidates. We look for specific things in our principals and the training we provide for them allows them to obtain those skills and so the deck is skewed in their favor." Dr. Atkins also shared that the leader applicant pool was predominantly Caucasian. This assertion was also voiced by other participants who observed that the high percentages of the minority students

necessitated more minority leaders in the school system, but the district did not attract many minority applicants, in spite of the targeted advertising and recruitment.

Overall, while describing the leader applicant pool, the Remote County School System participants made references to internal and external professional development as a pathway to preparing stronger leaders. The central office participants asserted that internally-provided and targeted professional learning prepared leaders with the skills needed to be successful principals of the schools in the district. The principals praised GLISI-provided initiatives that strengthened the applicants for the leadership positions. Dr. Lewis, the elementary school principal, explained, "We have a good applicant pool due to those programs we provided for staff development purposes, and we still have a lot of folks who are interested in getting higher degrees." Such descriptions of the professional development opportunities for aspiring leaders showed that in the context of the Remote County School System, professional learning was used to grow stronger and deeper an applicant pool of internal candidates for leadership positions.

Professional Development for Aspiring Leaders: We do Our Best

In the Remote County School System, professional development for aspiring administrators was targeting teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and assistant principals. The immediate 'training ground' for administrative roles included assistant principals and instructional coaches that frequently performed the duties of an assistant principal. The superintendent asserted, "I think the assistant principal is one of the most valuable training grounds for an administrator that you can have." However, not all schools in the Remote County School System had assistant principals. Assistant superintendent Dr. Norris explained,

> We earn positions based on enrollment. So few of our elementary schools do not have assistant principals, but all have instructional coaches. There are some differences [between the two positions], but for the purposes of professional development we hit both of those very similarly.

Central office participants expressed a hope that they would be able to afford more assistant principalship positions to allow more aspiring leaders to experience serving in the assistant principal position.

Overall, professional learning offered for the aspiring leaders was not formalized. However, the participants observed that there were considerable positive changes that occurred to professional development for teachers and assistant principals when the new superintendent came to the district. Superintendent Atkins states, "We have to focus more on that succession planning and professional development here. We have not gotten to this in a very formal fashion, at least not to my satisfaction." Central office participants were hoping that they would be able to provide more professional development opportunities for their aspiring leaders in the near future.

Professional learning opportunities for aspiring leaders in the Remote County School System were both formal and informal, provided internally and by external organizations (see Table 5.8). The internal professional learning was mostly informal.. The superintendent led regular meetings with assistant principals and instructional coaches to inform them about educational news in the district and state, changes in leadership, etc. Formal professional learning opportunities were externally provided by GLISI and principals could recommend their leaders to participate in these programs. The elementary school principal, Dr. Martinez, shared, "You can send teacher leaders to these programs [and even if they are not becoming principals], they are leaders in their positions and they bring value to the table and it improves leadership skills in general."

The principals provided their aspiring leaders with opportunities to perform different leadership duties. The high school principal, Riddle, stated, "What we do for assistant principals

178

is tying it back into those same competencies required to be an effective leader. To really get someone ready for principalship, you have to expose them to those competencies and build certain skills." Middle school principal Taylor provided his aspiring leaders with an opportunity of serving as a principal for a day because "if you sit at this desk for just one day and see the whole operation and everything that's going on, then your whole attitude changes."

Table 5.8

Remote County School System Professional Development for Aspiring Leaders

Initiative	Targeted Audience	Purpose
Developing High-performing Leaders At All Levels	Teacher leaders; assistant principals, coaches, principals	To develop effective, high-performing leaders; to improve and manage leader supply and performance.
Rising Stars Collaboratives	Teacher leaders; assistant principals, coaches, principals	To prepare future school leaders and support novice leaders; to support leader development, and performance management in the district.
Informal opportunities to perform leadership tasks	Teachers, assistant principals	To provide teacher leaders with opportunities to experience different tasks and responsibilities of principals and assistant principals.
Leadership Meetings	Assistant principals and principals	To inform assistant principals about the new policies and practices in the district, state, and the country.
Promising Practices	Assistant principals and principals	To focus of the value and qualities of the distributed leadership; to equip assistant principals and principals with the knowledge and skills that the leader should have to be effective.

The formal professional learning was provided by GLISI. The most frequently referenced and the most valued programs offered by GLISI were Developing High-performing

Leaders At All Levels (DHPLAAL) and the Rising Stars Collaboratives program. The

DHPLAAL training focused on leadership progression, where the district leaders were able to sit

together and outline the skills and abilities needed to be a successful leader in the Remote

County School System.

The director of human resource believed that the Rising Stars Collaboratives program

was "probably one of the strongest programs" focused on developing successful leaders. The

elementary school principal, Dr. Martinez, expressed a similar point-of-view when she shared,

"Rising Stars is a very effective program in preparing administrators for the next step, for the

principalship. It allows us to strengthen skills and to work on weaknesses depending on the

areas that need to be improved." The middle school principal, Taylor, who graduated from the

Rising Stars program, used the GLISI-developed modules and handouts to develop aspiring

leaders in his school.

Finally, aspiring leaders in the Remote County School System benefited from the

initiative called Promising Practices. This initiative started as a collaborative effort with the

local university, and at the time of the study, combined obtaining the leadership certificate

through the university-based training, and the district's focus on distributed leadership.

Assistant superintendent Norris shared that the initiative included "a lot of components

specifically designed for distributed leadership in providing assistant principals with

opportunities to really share [in] the work of the principal."

In summary, professional learning for aspiring leaders in the Remote County School

System served the purpose directly tied to leader succession in the district. Central office and

building level leaders provided professional learning opportunities for teacher leaders,

instructional coaches, and assistant principals with the main goal of preparing them for future

vacant leadership positions in the district. The district leaders acknowledged that their district was not the most attractive to outside applicants; therefore, they had to make sure they "were growing their own leaders." The major constraint the district experienced in providing professional learning initiatives was financial; therefore, externally-provided programs were sought after and welcomed. All the internally and externally provided professional development opportunities contributed to preparing stronger leaders and were considered in the hiring process.

The Hiring Process: A Team Approach

Due to the relatively small size of the school system, the central office adopted a 'community' approach to leading the district. The pervading model of decision-making was a team-based approach that involved multiple community and school system stakeholders. The hiring process for the vacant principal positions following this approach and there was a hiring committee formed to review the applications. The final recommendation to the board was made by the superintendent who reserved the right to approve or decline the candidates selected by the committee. Dr. Norris, the assistant superintendent, explained, "The superintendent makes the final decision to the board. He is the person who evaluates the principals, so he needs to have the final ownership of the person he placed in that position." To learn more about the applicants, the superintendent attended the interviews that the hiring committee had with those applicants who successfully passed through the screening process. However, he was a listener, not an active participant of these interviews.

Principal hiring processes in their current form had been developed when the current superintendent and assistant superintendent came to the district (three years prior to this study). All central office leaders involved in this study communicated the same stages to selecting a principal regardless of the level of their involvement in principal selection and hiring. Overall,

the principal hiring process in the Remote County School System involved nine major stages (see Figure 5.2).

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│        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│        │ District announces vacant principal   │           │
│        │            position                   │           │
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│                        │                                  │
│        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│        │ Applicants submit the application     │           │
│        │              forms                    │           │
│        └──────────────────────────────────────┘           │
│                        │                                  │
│        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│        │ The initial screening of the          │           │
│        │          applications                 │           │
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│                        │                                  │
│        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│        │ Selecting up to 10 applicants from    │           │
│        │ those who applied for the position    │           │
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│                        │                                  │
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│        │ Interview with the hiring committee   │           │
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│                        │                                  │
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│        │ Recommendations sent to the           │           │
│        │          Superintendent               │           │
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│                        │                                  │
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│        │ Interview with the Superintendent     │           │
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│        │ Recommendations of the Superintendent │           │
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│        │ Hiring decision made by the School    │           │
│        │             Board                     │           │
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Figure 5.2. Principal hiring process in the Remore County School System

All the central office participants were directly involved in principal hiring and served on the hiring committee. The committee had some 'constant' members (i.e., the assistant superintendent), while others differed depending on the position that was filled at the time. The committee members' selection was "driven by need and included principals or people who work closely with the person in a position that is to be filled," explained Dr. Jones, the human

resources director. At the time of the study, the hiring committee used a rubric to rank the

applicants by rating them as unacceptable (0 to 3 points), acceptable (4 to 7 points), or excellent

(8 to 11 points). The grading rubric included 13 major criteria:

- Leadership;

- School improvement experience/expertise;

- Proven track record of positive student performance results;

- Passion for performance improvement;

- Reflective practice;

- Personal integrity;

- Awareness/use of best practices in the work of school improvement;

- Effective interpersonal skills;

- Emotional intelligence;

- Proactive approach to problem solving;

- Organizational savvy;

- Effective communication skills; and,

- Technological skills and expertise.

The committee members also developed a list of characteristics or qualities to look for in the

applicants in regard to each of the criteria.

The principals in the study who have been hired going through this process described it

as a comprehensive approach. The important role of professional development they have

received prior to applying for the principalship was also acknowledged. Taylor, the middle

school principal, shared:

> During my tenure as an assistant principal, I participated in the Rising Stars Program
> offered by GLISI. I also participated in other initiatives like Summit and Base Camp.

183

Rising Stars was a yearlong process; I did not have to complete this program, but I think this actually put a feather in my cap against my competition when it came down to the final cut. That was the road map I took to obtain this position.

The first-year principal of the elementary school also expressed a similar belief that her participation in the Rising Stars programs strengthened her application.

In addition to the externally-provided initiatives, the principals in the study made references to the internal professional learning opportunities that prepared them for leadership positions. The elementary school principal, Dr. Martinez, shared that her principal knew of her leadership aspirations and provided her with growth opportunities in the school and also communicated her leadership goals to the superintendent who offered her a position of a graduation coach to get some first-hand leadership experience. Such descriptions placed targeted and relevant professional learning as an important factor in the principal hiring process and showed that while professional development was not a direct component of principal hiring, it was an important prerequisite to the successful application—being hired for the principalship.

Retention and Turnover: Not a Concern; Our Turnover is Low

Over time, the Remote County School System experienced a low turnover rate that was mainly due to the same number of schools in the district and to the fact that the majority of the employees were local to the county. A middle school principal, Taylor, explained, "Down here we don't have a lot of turnover in administration because most of the people live in the area and if they are doing a good job, most of them want to stay in their positions." However, the participants anticipated higher turnover rates in the near future because 5 principals (50%) had 30 and more years in education and could potentially retire soon. Dr. Jones, the human resources director, explained: "[the main trend in leader turnover] is retirements. We have four to six principals that could retire today."

184

To address the potential challenges that these retirements may present, central office leaders enrolled more aspiring leaders in the Rising Stars program and provided them with leadership opportunities such as serving as an instructional coach. One of the related barriers to growing leaders internally was the limited number of assistant principalships that were available in the district. The assistant superintendent, Dr. Norris, asserted, "I would like to be able to locally fund assistant principals at the elementary level, even though we don't truly earn them [due to small student population]. From a succession point-of-view, that would be to our advantage."

Other trends in leader turnover included losing principals that were commuting from other counties leaving because they found a place closer to home and principals' difficulties in coping with increasing accountability demands. Dr. Jones noted economic considerations that contributed to principal turnover "in the spring of the last year gas started to sneak up; so a lot of them [educators] thought, 'I don't care how much you love the school, you can get a job closer' to home." The assistant superintendent, Dr. Norris, elaborated on the challenges faced by the veteran principals in meeting the demands of the high-stakes accountability era. She offered:

> We had veteran principals who have been in their current positions for a number of years and the work has changed so drastically that they felt not prepared for the job anymore. That weighted heavily on a couple of our principals, so they have retired.

Dr. Norris noted that some of these principals took other positions in the district and were quite successful. The retirements of these principals opened up the positions that the superintendent Atkins had to fill in the first year of his tenure in the Remote County School System. Dr. Atkins described this situation as a blessing and a curse he had—a blessing, because he was able to appoint the leaders he would be working with, and a curse, because he did not have a chance to prepare them. Dr. Atkins shared:

For me it was developing the leadership as the turnover happened. I had to appoint a lot of people, but I did not have a chance to really develop those leadership capabilities. There is a lot of work to being a principal, so we are continuing to grow our own.

The superintendent asserted that the best way to address the challenges associated with the leadership turnover was "to open the pipeline and to develop leadership capacity throughout the entire district." The overall belief expressed by the participants was the conviction that internally grown leaders were better and stronger. The projected concern about "having enough prepared leaders to fill in the positions that may open in the district" showed that the system leaders expressed preference for internally grown applicants and did not expect an influx of well-prepared leaders from outside the county.

Although Remote County School System did not have a shortage of applicants, the central office leaders expressed a need for more minority applicants. The principals in the study, however, expressed concerns with appointing leaders only based on their minority status. The elementary school principal, Dr. Lewis, stated, "I really worry about those getting into positions simply because we need a certain race in order to keep our ratios in line."

There was the belief that there were many applicants with necessary credentials, but many applicants lacked the skills and abilities to be a successful leader. Dr. Lewis shared, "some of these people have gotten leadership degrees because it was convenient and easy and they did not establish themselves as leaders." To address the shortcomings of leadership certification programs, the district was providing professional learning to aspiring and novice leaders. Dr. Jones, the human resources director, admitted, "You cannot assume that they know how to [be a principal]. A lot has changed in the state and we've had to do a lot of training with the principals" to help them deal with the requirements of the position and to ensure principal retention.

In summary, principal turnover was low in the district. Following the appointment of several new principals several years prior to this study, the superintendent and his cabinet provided different professional learning opportunities to ensure principal retention and success. Overall, although professional learning for sitting and aspiring principals in the school system was not directly related to principal retention and turnover, it was used in the Remote County School System to address the challenges associated with the turnover and retention of leaders in the district.

Professional Development for Sitting Principals: A Collaborative Effort

Professional learning opportunities for principals were formal and informal, and the learning opportunities were provided by the central office, RESA, and GLISI (see Table 5.9). The main focus of professional learning provided for principals was on "the issues that were of the greatest priority, tying it back to a school or a district improvement plan," as Dr. Atkins asserted. Therefore, the internal and external professional development was reactive as it was mainly planned around the topics that were important for the district during that year. At the time of the study, the major foci of leader professional learning were standards-based learning and differentiated instruction.

Aligned with these foci, internally provided professional learning included book studies, promising practices, and the knowing by doing initiative. As a type of professional learning, principals received training on the Georgia School Keys, and Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards Analysis (GAPSS). Internal professional development initiatives were collaboratively planned and delivered by the superintendent and the assistant superintendent.

Table 5.9

Remote County School System Professional Development for Sitting Principals

Initiative	Targeted Audience	Purpose
Developing High-performing Leaders At All Levels	Teachers, coaches, assistant principals, principals	To develop high-performing leaders and to improve and manage leader supply and succession in the district.
Rising Stars Collaboratives	Teachers, coaches, assistant principals, principals	To prepare future school leaders and to support novice principals by providing them with needed professional development.
Leadership Meetings	Assistant principals, principals	To inform principals about educational news in the district, state, and the nation.
Promising Practices	Instructional coaches, assistant principals, principals	To examine the value and qualities of the distributed leadership and to promote this type of leadership in the district.
Standards-Based Learning for Administrators	Principals	To provide an overview of the standards-based instruction; to make school leaders familiar with its major characteristics.
"From Knowing to Doing"	Principals	To explain how to move from a traditional classroom to a standards-based instruction.
"Designing Performance Tasks"	Principals	To provide information about designing performance tasks aligned with the standards.
Book Studies	Principals	To analyze and discuss the books that can be practically applied in practice.
Leading for Excellence through the Georgia School Keys	Principals	To examine the Georgia School Keys, GAPSS analysis, school self-assessment; to learn how to align performance tasks with content standards in a classroom.
"Adding Value Where You Are"	Principals	To review balance scorecard, competency models, job descriptions, evaluation instruments, etc.

The superintendent explained that these initiatives were not obligatory for all leaders. Dr. Atkins outlined the differentiated nature of leader professional development in the district: "It is not like in the times past when we would do something on classroom management or student discipline and everyone comes. Well, not everyone needs that." He also noted that external speakers were strategically selected based on their expertise.

The Remote County School System adopted a collaborative approach to planning and providing professional learning for sitting principals. The collaboration was evident not only in planning of professional learning initiatives and combining internal and external sources of professional development, but also in collaborative participation of building and central office leaders in these initiatives.

Reflecting on collaborating with external agencies, superintendent Atkins offered: "One of the best things that we've done collaboratively with our principals were the Base Camp and Summit. It was my first opportunity to have those people away from their buildings, really focusing on the new work." The Base Camp and the Leadership Summit were GLISI-provided trainings that served not only instructional goals, but also team-building goals.

One of the strong themes that surfaced from the data was the belief that professional development has undergone significant changes after the new superintendent came to the district. The participants believed that these changes were needed and important. The veteran principal of an elementary school, Lewis, asserted, "That's been a big change over the years because there was time when staff development was totally disjointed from what was going on in a classroom." The novice elementary school principal, Martinez, shared her recollections of the traditional professional learning that the district provided in the past:

> In the past, it's been more traditional where the central office personnel would always redeliver professional development. As a teacher, I can remember someone from the

central office coming once a month and redelivering [the same information]. Now I see that central office is working to help principals deliver the [training] at their sites. To me it is more personable and teachers realize that principal is an instructional leader.

Taylor, a middle school principal who was new to the system when he took the principalship position, stated, "Since the day I came to Remote County, I see that professional development is now more a part of a big picture. It is not a 'hit or miss' professional development; it is all a part of a plan" for district improvement.

Overall, leader professional development in the district was geared toward practical knowledge and skills. Central office leaders worked to ensure that professional development they provided for principals was focused, job-embedded, and included issues related to instructional leadership. The assistant superintendent, Norris who was officially responsible for planning professional learning in the district, shared, "Our primary focus has been on equipping our principals with the specific things that they need to lead instructional improvement in their buildings, to lead their teachers in the new curriculum and implementation." The high school principal, Riddle, supported this assertion by stating, "Most of the training for our administrators is directed toward quality leadership skills and moving toward a standards-based school and system."

The overall conviction expressed by the participants was that professional learning provided for principals in the district was effective and of high-quality. The middle school principal, Taylor, believed that "professional development in this county is exactly what it is supposed to be. It is on-track, it's timely, it's cutting edge." Taylor further expressed a conviction that professional development they offered would contribute to the change and positive improvements in the schools and in the district overall. The superintendent focused on the current education discourse accountability and standards and believed that professional

learning on data analysis and standards-based classrooms "may be one of the most significant changes that we have brought about in this district," but he also saw the room to grow and improve the initiatives and programs that they had in place. Dr. Norris, the assistant superintendent, summarized, "I think our approach is very effective. However, it could be more effective if [it was tailored to the needs of every school]."

In summary, although the central office leaders believed that "the best type of professional development is local," the district was unable to provide everything on their own due to time and financial constraints. The superintendent reflected, "As a small district we are limited in how much we can provide." Therefore, the district collaborated with GLISI and attended many programs and initiatives offered by this organization. Such collaboration was beneficial to the district and was praised by the central office leaders and the principals who used GLISI-developed modules to develop the staff in their schools.

Descriptions of professional development that the participants provided did not tie it directly to leader succession in the district; rather, professional development was focused on supporting the sitting leaders and ensuring their success as instructional leaders in their schools. Because this approach to professional learning was quite successful, the system planned to continue in that direction in the future, providing more job-embedded learning opportunities for their principals.

Principal Succession: We Are Developing a Formal Plan

Although participants recognized the need for and the importance of leader succession planning, the Remote County School System did not have a formal succession plan. The principals in the study pointed to the GLISI initiatives as related to leader succession planning, while the central office leaders shared that the district was in the process of developing such a

191

plan. Dr. Norris, the assistant superintendent, stated, "at this point it is more an informal plan, we don't have a written succession plan, but that's what we are working toward." As a step in this direction, the central office leaders developed job descriptions for the leadership positions in the district to define the knowledge, skills, and abilities that the district was looking for in the applicants.

The superintendent regarded leader succession as essentially important to the success of the district. Being the first superintendent in the last 40 years hired from outside the school district, Dr. Atkins brought the new approach to planning. Regarding principal succession, Dr. Atkins shared:

> I can change something about leader succession and I am doing that. Here there was an old mindset and we have changed that. For leadership, I want everyone in the district to know that it doesn't have anything to do with race, gender, age, or ethnic background. What matters to me is the right set of skills. And I think that sometimes having the new blood, fresh eyes is very appropriate.

Although some of the external appointments had "shaken the community," the pushback has decreased with time. However, there were still indications of leader succession based on the approach "I want my people in the leadership positions." For instance, Dr. Lewis, the elementary school principal, indicated that some leaders were appointed based on their connections by stating: "I would like in all situations for the best person to get the job, not because they go to a certain church. [I would like to] remove the politics from the process."

Among the challenges associated with principal succession in the district, superintendent Atkins noted the need to change the culture of the district in regard to the practices of filling in the vacant positions and the lack of time to focus entirely on the issues surrounding principal succession. In addition to these, the assistant superintendent, Dr. Norris, also noted that leader succession would be strengthened if the district provided more training and professional learning opportunities for their aspiring leaders. However, Dr. Norris also asserted that principal

succession has undergone significant changes in the way it was approached and she proudly reported, "We have made a lot of headway in that direction [of district, school, and leader improvement]; we still have a lot of work to do, but we are making great strides in that direction."

Principal succession planning was tied to "growing our own leaders," preparing aspiring leaders from inside the system. To accomplish this goal, the Remote County School System relied on the external organization, namely, GLISI. The participants acknowledged that by participating in the GLISI initiatives, they realized the importance of principal succession planning for the success of the district. Furthermore, two of the GLISI-provided initiatives (DHPLAAL and Rising Stars) were consistently given as examples of trainings aimed at leader succession in the district.

The DHPLAAL training was particularly effective for the district leaders who found it "right in synch with our thinking" on leader succession. The superintendent explained, "We were in the third cohort of the DHPLAAL training. GLISI had already done a lot of research in that area, and we've stayed in pretty close contact with them [since then] because the documents continued to evolve." Overall, the central office leaders expressed respect for the professional learning initiatives provided by GLISI, and they believed that participation in these programs benefited the leaders and the district at large.

When asked about leader succession plans in the district, principals referred to the Rising Stars as a program that supported principal succession planning in the Remote County School System. Taylor, the middle school principal, offered, "The involvement of the district in the GLISI initiatives, in the Rising Stars, was a way of preparing future leaders. You cannot just wait until these principals retire, [you have to] prepare for the future." Furthermore, principals

believed that participation in Rising Stars increased the likelihood of the applicant to be appointed as a principal.

The central office leaders confirmed these suppositions. The superintendent stated, "Participation in the Rising Stars is not a prerequisite for appointment, but I would say they [Rising Stars graduates] will have some preferred status." Similarly, the human resources director, Jones, asserted, "If a person has gone through Rising Stars or has been an instructional coach or has served in any other leadership role—that gives them a definite advantage over someone who has not had all those things."

In summary, leader succession in the Remote County School System was not a formally planned process. However, even though the district did not have a formal succession plan, the district leaders acknowledged the importance of planning for leader succession in the district. Due to the financial constraints, the district was unable to provide multiple initiatives on their own; therefore, the Remote County School System reached out to GLISI and participated in GLISI-provided initiatives for growing future leaders and developing the sense of urgency about leader progression. Professional development programs provided by GLISI dominated the descriptions of the district's leader succession planning, showing that in the context of the Remote County School System professional learning was seen as a part of the district's leader succession planning.

Planning Principal Professional Development and Succession: It Should be a Shared Responsibility, but it is Currently Done by the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent

The participants shared a belief that planning principal professional learning and succession were very important processes. The superintendent and the principals expressed the

view that this planning "should be a shared process" that involved leaders at all levels. However, in reality, the process did not involve shared decision-making, with major decisions related to principal professional learning and succession made by the superintendent and the assistant superintendent for student achievement. The opinions of other central office leaders and principals were taken into account, but the decisions were made by the superintendent's cabinet. The process of planning for principals' professional learning and succession was quite simple in the Remote County School System and was concentrated in the superintendent's office (see Figure 5.3).

When asked about those responsible for planning principal professional learning and succession in the district, the principals were not sure they could name the team or the individual in charge. However, upon deliberation, they pointed to superintendent Atkins, assistant superintendent Norris, and human resources director Jones. The principals believed that it was the office of student achievement led by assistant superintendent Norris that was making most of the decisions that were later approved by the superintendent.

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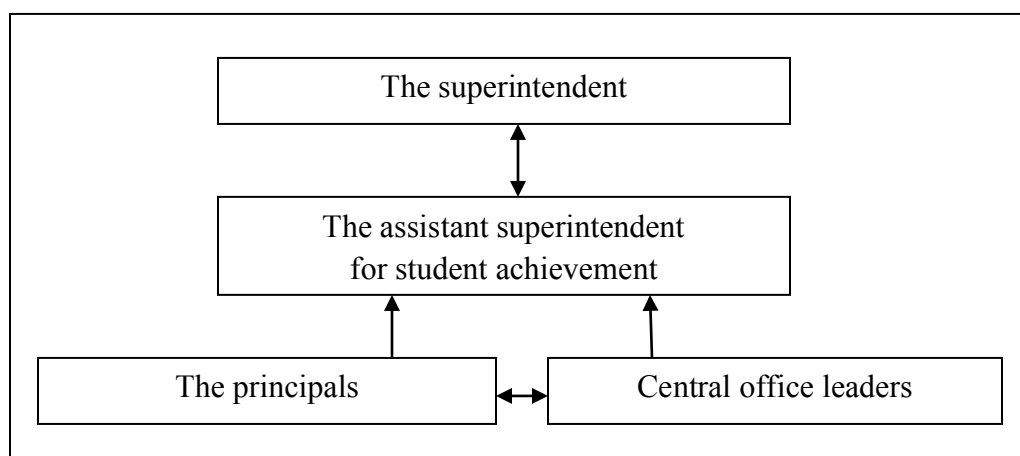
Figure 5.3. Principal Professional Development and Succession Planning in the Remote County School System

The central office participants confirmed this view. The superintendent explained, "Ultimately, the buck stops with me. But I work very closely with my assistant superintendent for student achievement [Dr. Norris]." Dr. Norris spoke along the same lines: "Dr. Atkins and I plan together. He will come to me with particular things that he would like to see addressed." Dr. Norris and Dr. Atkins considered the opinions and needs of the principals expressed during their regular meetings with the superintendent.

The participants did not express any concerns related to principal professional development planning. Principal succession planning, however, was not agreeable to all participants. Assistant superintendent Norris took ultimate responsibility for principal succession planning; the human resources director Jones believed that succession belongs to her division and therefore, she should be responsible. Dr. Jones shared that she "had a disagreement about that [with Norris] in front of the superintendent and a board member. She [Norris] told me that we cannot co-chair" the principal succession planning committee. Dr. Norris, on the other hand, described the succession process as a "joint responsibility between the superintendent, human resources director, and the board of education." This findings show that there was no common understanding of how the district planned for principal succession (including but not limited to current hiring decisions and planning for future hiring decisions) that may be explained by the fact that the district was in the beginning of the concerted efforts aimed at leader succession planning at the time of this study.

In conclusion, in the Remote County School System principal professional learning and succession planning were done by the same people. The district followed a top-down approach where all the decisions were made by the superintendent and the assistant superintendent with minimal input from the principals, other central office personnel, and the board of education.

The descriptions of the planning processes evoked not only the same central office leaders involved, but also referenced GLISI, whose programs and initiatives were closely tied to planning succession and professional learning for aspiring and sitting leaders.

Principal Professional Learning and Succession: In the Transition

The analysis of the data from the Remote County School system participants revealed that principal professional learning and succession planning in the district have undergone significant changes over the last three years. The changes were initiated by the new superintendent and his cabinet and were described as positive and needed. Those participants who have worked in the district for more than four years compared the processes of professional development and succession in the past (before the current superintendent) and now (the last three years) and generally agreed that these changes were beneficial for the district. However, not all the changes were readily accepted by the school system community used to "the old ways of doing business." The superintendent asserted that it was his job to advance professional development and succession planning of school leaders, but acknowledged the challenges he faced in the process.

The examination of the participants' descriptions of the processes related to principal professional development and succession planning in the Remote County School System revealed four major themes connecting these two phenomena:

1. Leader succession in the district was skewed in favor of internal applicants that were believed to be better prepared;

2. Principal professional development and succession were collaborative efforts of the central office and GLISI;

197

3. Describing principal professional learning and succession, participants expressed strong preference for locally planned and provided initiatives; and,

4. Although initially resisted, policies and practices of the current superintendent improved principal professional learning and succession planning in the district.

These themes are briefly explained below.

First, leader succession in the Remote County School System was skewed in favor of internal applicants. Several major trends emerged that supported this theme, predominantly rooted in the belief that their county was not among the most attractive to the external applicants and that internal applicants were better prepared. The participants recognized that their district was not the most attractive county for the applicants from outside the county and outside the state. Therefore, the external applicants they had were not well-prepared to be effective leaders. It is worth noting however, that the hiring rubric used to assess the applicants did not allocate extra points for being an internal applicant. Furthermore, internal 'local' applicants were viewed as better-prepared as they had the opportunity to benefit from professional learning opportunities provided by the central office and GLISI. Finally, in spite of the fact that the district was slowly adopting new policies and practices introduced by the superintendent, the remnants of the 'good old boy' approach to running a school district were communicated by the participating principals.

Second, principal professional learning and succession in the district were collaborative efforts of the central office and GLISI. Due to the small size of the district coupled with the financial constraints, the Remote County School System collaborated with GLISI to provide the best formal and informal initiatives for their aspiring and sitting leaders that they could afford. Central and building level leaders shared the responsibility of proving professional learning for

198

the aspiring leaders, mostly on the informal side. GLISI-provided programs and initiatives were more formalized, described as "evidence-based," thus fitting into the accountability discourse of the high-stakes evidence-driven era in education.

Third, while describing principal professional learning and succession in the district, the participants expressed strong preference for locally planned and provided initiatives. Partially related to the first theme about the preference of the internal applicants for the principalship, the belief that 'local was better' permeated all the topics related to principal professional learning and succession that were examined in this chapter. The idea that 'local was better' surfaced in the descriptions of the applicant pool, hiring practices, professional development, and succession planning in the district. The participants noted that their school system had special characteristics and needs that were best understood by the insiders. The preference for local leaders contributed to ensuring principal retentions because internal leaders lived in the county and "wanted to stay in their positions" if they were successful. The training of future leaders from inside the district allowed the central office leaders to "train [them] in what is important for us, for our district," or, as the superintendent stated, "to prepare for our needs." It is worth noting the paradox that the superintendent was an outsider to the district when he was hired and several of his first hires were from outside the district. However, at the time of the study, Dr. Atkins was highly supportive of the "local is better" philosophy communicated by all the participants from the Remote County School System.

Finally, descriptions of principal professional learning and succession in the district reflected the positive changes that occurred to these practices after the current superintendent was hired. Although initially resisted, policies and practices of the current superintendent and his office improved principal professional development and succession planning in the district.

Overall, the leadership practices introduced and promoted by the new district leadership were more formalized, more focused, and relevant to the needs of the leaders, schools, and the district overall. Professional learning for aspiring and sitting leaders became more focused, job-embedded, and differentiated based on the leaders' needs. In addition, the new district leadership paid more attention to leader succession planning in the district that resulted in close collaboration with GLISI to "grow our own" leaders.

Describing principal professional learning and succession in the school system, participants contrasted the new (under current district leadership) and the old (before the current leadership) systems. The major changes that occurred to the district's policies and practices were largely driven by the current superintendent and his office who believed in "growing our own leaders" while also recognizing that "sometimes real changes come from the outside." These changes were described as positive and the participants believed that the district was "on the right track" to improvement.

The next chapter provides the cross-case analysis of the themes related to principal professional learning and succession planning in two school systems in the study. The common and different themes based on how these two systems addressed principal professional learning and succession. Finally, the overarching themes on the connections between principal professional development and succession through the analysis of current practices in the preparation, growth, and retention of school leaders are provided.

CHAPTER 6

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the connections between principal succession and professional learning through the analysis of the current practices in leader identification, development, support, and retention in two Georgia school districts. This study situated professional development in the context of principal succession. Three major aspects of this topic were targeted: professional development provided for current administrators; professional learning for aspiring leaders; and the relationship between professional development and principal succession. The study was guided by three overall research questions:

1. How do current leader identification, development, support, and retention practices foster principal professional growth and build leadership pipeline?

2. How do the district leaders describe an "effective" principal in conversations on leader professional development and succession planning?

3. In the context of participating districts and school leaders, what is the relationship between principal succession and professional learning?

This chapter focused on the comparison of the findings in two school systems participating in this study. The chapter includes three major sections: (1) the similarities and differences in the systems' approaches to principal professional learning and succession; (2) the major themes across two districts as described in chapters 4 and 5; and (3) principal professional learning and succession conceptualized within the systems' contexts.

Findings

To examine the connections between these two phenomena related to educational administration (professional learning and succession), single case analyses focused on seven topics related to professional development and succession of school principals: the applicant pool; professional development for aspiring leaders; the hiring process; retention and turnover of leaders; professional development for sitting principals; principal succession process; and planning of principal professional learning and succession. The cross-case analysis of these topics revealed the commonalities and differences in how two districts in this study approached principal professional development and succession (see Table 6.1). The major themes that emerged within each of these topics are presented next in this chapter.

The Applicant Pool: Focus on Growing Leaders Inside the District

Among the common characteristics across the two school systems, the participants described the applicant pool as younger, stronger, better prepared, and more diverse than in the past. Although both districts conducted external advertising (with the larger district (Illustrative) reaching out to other states, not only to other counties), they expressed strong preference for internal applicants. The reason for this preference was that internal applicants were generally stronger having gone through the innovative leadership development programs. To this end, Illustrative County School System relied on the internally-developed Leader Academy, while the Remote County School System depended on the Rising Start program provided by the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI). Furthermore, the difference in the size resulted in the low need for leaders in the Remote County School System, while the Illustrative County School System experienced a high need of principals due to the large size and to the opening of several new schools every year.

Table 6.1

Cross-case Analysis by Topic

Topic	Illustrative County School System	Remote County School System
Applicant pool: differences	- High need - Reliance on internal leader development program	- Low need - Reliance on external leader development program
Applicant pool: commonalities	- The mentality of "growing our own" leaders - No principal shortages in the school system - The importance of the superintendent's vision to strengthening the applicant pool - Principal applicant pool is growing larger, younger, and stronger - Combining internal and external recruitment of principals - Overall preference for the internal applicants	
Professional development for aspiring leaders: differences	- Proactive planning - Mostly internally provided - Targeted groups: teachers, assistant principals	- Reactive planning - Internal and external - Targeted groups: teacher leaders; instructional coaches; assistant principals
Professional development for aspiring leaders: commonalities	- Regarding assistant principals as "the main training ground" for the principalship - Providing aspiring leaders with an opportunity to serve as a principal - Predominantly school-based professional learning - Cohort partnerships with universities	
Hiring process: differences	- Choosing the best - No reputational hiring; hiring the best candidate	- "Playing closer to the vest" - Remnants of "good old boy" approach to hiring
Hiring Process: commonalities	- Hiring as a comprehensive process - Involving multiple people in principal hiring - Preference for the graduates of leader development programs	
Retention and turnover: differences	- Anticipated turnover - Transition plan is present - Internal development	- Low turnover - No formal plan - Internal and external programs
Retention and turnover: commonalities	- Retiring of baby-boomer generation leaders - Developing leadership capacity in the district - Connect principal succession planning to professional learning	

Table 6.1

Cross-case Analysis by Topic (Continued)

Topic	Illustrative County School System	Remote County School System
Principal succession: differences	- Close attention to leader succession - Succession viewed as central to the district's success	- Succession is not a concern due to the low turnover - Importance of leader succession is recognized
Principal succession: commonalities	- Tying principal succession to "growing our own leaders" philosophy evident in both districts - A recognized need for formal principal succession plan	
Professional development for principals: differences	- Proactive planning - Emphasis on mentoring - Differentiated professional learning	- Reactive planning - Wishing to have mentoring - Mostly, the same programs offered for all principals
Professional development for principals: commonalities	- The shift to job-embedded and continuous professional learning - Belief that principal professional learning is effective - Conviction that the best professional learning is local - Combining internal and internal professional learning initiatives	
Planning professional development and succession: differences	- The culture of "all are responsible" (joint effort) - A shared agreement of the participants on the processes involved in planning - Relying on themselves	- The responsibility lies with the superintendent's office - No common understanding among leaders of how these processes are planned - Reliance on GLISI
Planning professional development and succession: commonalities	- The expressed need for a formal (written) professional development and principal succession plans - Principal felt responsible for growing leaders inside their schools - To a different degree, principals' opinions and needs are taken into account while planning professional development and succession	

Professional Development for Aspiring Leaders: Combining Internally and Externally

Provided Initiatives

Both districts in the study recognized the importance of providing professional learning

for aspiring leaders and recognized assistant principals as "the best training ground" for the

principalship. However, while the Illustrative County School System targeted teacher leaders

and teachers in addition to assistant principals, the Remote County School System focused

mainly on the instructional coaches and assistant principals. Both districts combined internally

and externally provide professional learning opportunities: the Illustrative County favored

internally developed initiatives, while the Remote County relied heavily on the external

providers, predominantly, GLISI.

The on-site learning opportunities available for aspiring leaders were similar across the

two districts and included regular leadership meetings and opportunities to experience being a

principal for a day. Both districts partnered with local universities to assist their aspiring leaders

with obtaining leadership credentials. Overall, although both districts provided professional

learning opportunities for their aspiring leaders, the Illustrative County School System provided

more formal and internally-developed programs, while the Remote County School System

offered predominantly informal professional learning and relied heavily on the external

providers.

The Hiring Process: A Multi-stage Procedure Involving Many People

Principal hiring in both school systems was a lengthy complex process that included

several stages and involved multiple people. The main decision was made by the superintendent

who recommended an applicant to the school board. The participants from both districts

believed that principal hiring in their school system was a fair and a comprehensive procedure.

The differences between the districts' approaches to principal hiring lay in the systemic

differences including the distinct institutional cultures and the resources available to train the

leaders from within the systems. The Illustrative County School System shared the conviction

that the best person for the position should be hired thus defying reputational hiring. The

Remote County School System frequently hired from within that showed both remnants of the traditional "good old boy" approach to running a school system and a conviction that internal applicants were more likely to stay in the district, thus minimizing leader turnover in the school system. Finally, both districts accounted for the participation in the leader development program (Leader Academy and Rising Stars) while making principal hiring decisions.

Retention and Turnover: Not a Concern

The districts in this study were not concerned about principal retention and turnover. However, the reasons for low concerns over these topics were different. The Remote County School System experienced low turnover due to its small size, and the Illustrative County School System anticipated leader turnover but was prepared to effectively deal with it. Therefore, the Illustrative County School System had a stronger transition plan that included providing mentors for all new principals for their first two years in a seat that served to meet the socialization and professional development needs of the systems.

The themes, related to principal retention and turnover, were linked to the assurances of having a strong applicant pool (as explained earlier in this chapter) and to growing their own leaders ready to assume the positions once they became open. Both systems have experienced the retirement of leaders from the baby-boomers' generation and took measures to grow their aspiring leaders inside the district. Finally, both districts were developing the leadership capacity in the system to face the possible challenges of leader retention and turnover.

Professional Development for Principals: Proactive Versus Reactive

Although both districts acknowledged the importance of principal professional development, they took a different approach to planning and selecting professional development to be offered to their sitting building leaders. The Illustrative County School System adopted a

proactive approach and selected professional learning opportunities to prepare their principals to

what they would likely face in the future based on the overview of the trends in educational

leadership in the state and the country. The Remote County School System exhibited a more

reactive way to handle principal professional development and offered professional learning

based on the issues faced by their principals at the time.

The participants from both systems believed that principal professional learning in their

systems was effective and high-quality. Both districts attempted to provide continuous, job-

embedded, and differentiated professional development for their leaders. Similarly, both districts

believed that the best professional learning was local. Finally, both districts adopted a

collaborative approach to principal professional learning and combined internally and externally

developed initiatives; however, the Illustrative County School System relied mostly on the

internal programs, while the Remote County School System depended on GLISI-provided

initiatives.

Principal Succession: It is Important

Both districts acknowledged the importance of attending to principal succession.

However, while the Illustrative County School System developed a well-planned approach to

address principal succession, the Remote County School System was in the process of

developing a succession plan. The reasons for this differences included varying needs for

ensuring principal progression in the districts (as related to high and low principal turnover) and

the longevity of a superintendent. In the Illustrative County, the superintendent has been in his

position for over 13 years and during his lengthy tenure, Dr. Adams developed the district's

leader succession plan. In the Remote County, the superintendent was new (in his third year at

the time of this study) and, having changed the ways the district was operating for many years,

207

Dr. Atkins began attending to principal succession planning in a more formal way when these data were collected. In summary, both districts connected their leader succession planning to "growing our own leaders" philosophy and recognized the need for more formal and detailed principal succession plans in their school systems.

Planning Principal Professional Development and Succession: The Responsibility of the Central Office Leaders

Both school systems had formal processes in place that ensured timely planning of principal professional learning and succession in the district. This planning was done by the central office leaders, but took into account the opinions of the principals. In the Illustrative County, the planning was done by the Leadership Development Council consisting of central office leaders, while in the Remote County, the planning was done mostly by the superintendent and the assistant superintendent for student achievement.

The differences between these two approaches showed that the larger district regarded this planning as a joint effort, while the smaller district concentrated the control over the planning processes in the superintendent's cabinet. Another major difference in the districts' approaches to planning was that the Illustrative County School System participants relied on themselves in planning principal professional development and succession, while the Remote County School System was highly dependent on GLISI in terms of the directions in planning and the initiatives provided for their aspiring and sitting leaders.

Cross-case Analysis: Major Themes

The trends that arose from the topics related to principal professional learning and succession in the two districts in the study may be summarized into five major themes:

1. A key component to the overall success of principal professional learning and succession is a visionary superintendent;

2. Planning for principal succession, school districts strongly favor the local applicants;

3. In light of the anticipated principal turnover, growing leaders from within the district is an effective way to ensure leader continuity;

4. In the process of growing future principals, school districts express strong preference for the non-university leader preparation programs, tailored to the needs of their districts; and,

5. Leader professional development and succession are tightly connected, as demonstrated by the school districts' practices in the preparation, support, and retention of principals.

A brief description of each of these themes follows.

First, a visionary superintendent emerged as a critical component to the overall success of principal professional learning and succession. Although principal professional development and succession depend on multiple people in the district, the superintendent was a single key person to the success of these processes in the district. Both school systems in the study emphasized the importance of a superintendent's vision to the effective and timely planning of principal professional learning and succession. In the Illustrative County School System, the superintendent has had a long tenure that allowed him to establish processes and practices that ensured principal continuity in the district. In the Remote County School System, the superintendent was new to the district, but in his three years of superintendency in the district, he has made multiple changes targeted at improving the processes important to the principals' success in the school system. In summary, although the superintendents were not solely

responsible for principal professional learning and succession, their vision and efforts were central to ensuring smooth leader progression in their districts.

Second, while planning for principal succession, the school districts strongly favored the local applicants. In spite of some differences between the districts in the reasons for preferring internally developed principals (as described earlier in this chapter), both large and small school systems expressed strong preference for principals internal to their district. The motivation behind this choice lies in the belief that having experienced teaching in the district, internal candidates were more familiar with the policies, practices, and culture of their school districts. Furthermore, local applicants were more likely to remain in the principalship position longer as compared to those from outside the district. Finally, internal applicants for the principalships were viewed as better prepared having had an opportunity to participate in the Leader Academy (Illustrative County School System) and in the Rising Stars (Remote County School System) that were valued by the building and central office leaders participating in this study.

Third, in light of the anticipated principal turnover, growing leaders from within the district was an effective way to ensure leader continuity. To a different degree, both school systems had a philosophy of "growing our own leaders." Closely intertwined with the previous theme of favoring local applicants, the attempts to grow their own future leaders were linked to the districts' efforts to be independent of an external supply of future leaders that they had no control over.

The leaders of these two districts valued the opportunity to have some control over the supply of the quality principals in the district and believed it was their job to grow future leaders from among the ranks of current teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and assistant principals. In the Illustrative County School System, such an approach has been in place for over a decade,

210

while in the Remote County School System, this concept was relatively new since it was introduced by the current superintendent three years before this study. An added benefit to growing leaders from within the system was ensuring that future principals were aligned with the superintendent's mission, vision, and goals for the district. All the participants from both school systems believed that it was important to grow their own leaders and worked toward that goal on the school level (sitting principals) and on the school system level (central office participants).

Fourth, in the process of growing future principals, school districts expressed strong preference for the non-university leader preparation programs, tailored to the needs of their districts. The idea behind this preference was somewhat similar to favoring internal applicants and was grounded in the overall conviction that "local was better." The participants did not criticize traditional university-based leader preparation programs; however, the shortcomings of these programs were acknowledged in the abundant praise of local leader preparation programs that were described as more relevant due to their focus on practical skills and knowledge.

The Illustrative County School System had more resources and offered an internally-developed Leader Academy that focused entirely on the context of this district and prepared principals for the needs and realities of this school system. Being small in size and lacking resources, the Remote County School System relied on the externally-provided Rising Stars leader development program. Although Rising Stars was not totally tailored to the needs of the Remote County School System (several districts from across the state were participating in this program at the same time), it accounted for some contextual characteristics of every school district and was geared toward practical skills essential for an effective leader to know.

Overall, these leader preparation programs were viewed as effective because they were more practical and more selective that the university-based leader preparation programs (i.e., not

everyone could participate in these district-offered programs as there was a limited number of places available and the participants were selected by the sitting principals and further affirmed by the superintendent). More importantly, both the Leader Academy and Rising Stars served the needs of both professional development and succession planning, thus closely connecting these two phenomena related to the principalship.

Finally, the fifth theme was related directly to the purpose on this study—examining the connections between principal professional learning and succession through the analysis of current practices in the identification, development, support, and retention of school leaders. Based on the analysis of data used for this study, leader professional learning and succession were tightly connected, as demonstrated by the school districts' practices in the preparation, support, and retention of principals. Both school districts were providing professional learning opportunities for their aspiring and sitting principals and multiple initiatives and programs met the goals of both principal professional learning and principal succession (i.e., internal leader development programs, district-level leadership meetings, being a principal-for-a-day, etc.).

Although these two districts differed in size and resources that impacted professional development they were able to offer for their aspiring and sitting leaders, professional learning that was a part of every component of principal succession planning in these school districts:

- growing the applicant pool;

- the hiring process;

- minimizing the leader turnover and increasing principal retention; and,

- supporting principals at different career stages.

Professional development emerged as an important component of an principal succession planning and was a part of the principal preparation, support, and retention in the district.

The examination of the topics related to the principalship with a focus on the similarities and the differences in the approaches of the two districts in the study to managing professional development and succession provided valuable data on how the districts different in size, resources, and location approach these phenomena related to the principalship. These findings, supported by the major themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis, framed two approaches to managing principal professional learning and succession in the different school systems' contexts. These two approaches are briefly discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Principal Professional Learning and Succession in the Context of a Large, Urban School System

The Illustrative County School System was a large, urban school district with considerable resources available for the central office leaders to design, implement, evaluate, and improve different initiatives and programs for their aspiring and sitting school leaders. In the context of this school district, principal professional development and succession were well-planned and carefully-designed processes that involved multiple stakeholders and that have gone through multiple iterations to improve these programs and to increase their impact on schools and school leaders.

Being large in size and growing (104 schools at the time of the study and with several new schools projected to open per year), the Illustrative County School System was anticipating leader turnover, but was prepared for it. Principal turnover was not a concern for this district because of the concerted efforts of the sitting principals and central office leaders to prepare a new generation of principals through the school-based professional development (i.e., principal-for-a-day; distributed leadership responsibilities) and the central office initiatives (i.e., regular leadership meetings, the Leader Academy, etc.). The Illustrative County School System adopted

a proactive approach to planning professional development for their leaders and reviewed the trends in educational policy and practice to offer those professional learning opportunities that would benefit their leaders in the future.

The Illustrative County School System strategically partnered with the universities and other educational organizations to offer the best, the most relevant, and the most effective professional learning. The large size of the central office brought together experienced and visionary leaders with broad and extensive leadership experience that collaboratively planned and provided timely and relevant professional learning that served as a system of socialization, development, and support for their sitting and aspiring principals.

Extensive resources allowed the leaders of the Illustrative County School System to develop their own Leader Academy that was tailored to the needs and realities of their school district. The combination of resources and visionary leaders enabled this district to successfully address the demands of the accountability era by themselves, without having to apply for the assistance from the universities or from the state. Although the district was partnering with other educational institutions, the culture of this large school system praised and valued locally developed programs and initiatives that allowed them to grow strong and well-prepared local principals. Overall, principal professional learning and succession planning in this district may be described as independent processes, fully managed on the system level, with no expectations for assistance from other entities outside the district.

Principal professional development and succession planning in the Illustrative County School System were joint efforts of the central office leaders, overseen by the superintendent. The importance of planning principal succession was recognized by all the participants that communicated a shared belief that "we do not leave principal succession to chance."

The limitations of such an approach to planning and directing principal professional learning and succession were mainly concentrated in the acknowledged preference for everything local (i.e., locally developed programs and initiatives; principals hired from the local applicants; etc.). Even if all of the programs offered by the district were of excellent quality, focusing only on the local context may lead to losing the view of a big picture, of those realities, initiatives, and successes occurring in other districts and states. Furthermore, a practice of hiring local leaders may result in the district having principals who, although well-acquainted with "the ways and the culture of the district," may not be able to see beyond this school system, may not be able to bring the innovative ways of approaching teaching, learning, and leading, different from those adopted by the school system.

In summary, the Illustrative County School System took principal professional learning and succession seriously and had multiple programs in place that ensured successful leadership continuity in the district. A good reputation and convenient location not only attracted multiple applicants for teaching and leadership positions but also allowed the district to develop cohort partnerships with the universities located nearby. Abundant resources enabled the district's independence from other providers of educational services and allowed central office leaders to develop their own leader preparation program, a mentoring program, and multiple professional learning initiatives that not only aimed at growing future leaders, but also supported the sitting leaders.

In the context of a large, urban Illustrative County School System, principal professional learning and succession planning were closely intertwined as the district included professional development programs and initiatives as a part of the major components of principal succession, such as principal preparation, support, and retention. Overall, the Illustrative County School

System recognized the importance of planning for principal succession in the district and responded to this need by providing multiple forms of professional development and carefully planning leadership continuity in the district.

Principal Professional Learning and Succession in the Context of a Small, Rural School System

The context of the Remote County School System was quite different as this school district was small, rural, and located in a geographical area that was not the most attractive for the applicants from outside the county and outside the state. Over time, this school system was quite stable, with little variation in staff and student enrollment. Furthermore, the district has practiced reputational hiring for many years that minimized the need for growing future leaders. The situation in this school system changed noticeably when the current superintendent assumed his position. It was the superintendent who introduced a new approach to principal professional learning and succession that the system had in place at the time of this study.

In the context of a small rural school system, the turnover was low; therefore, the need for principal succession planning was not great either. Nevertheless, central office leaders realized the importance of developing principals for the future needs of the district. Although the district did not anticipate opening new schools in the near future, they had five veteran principals who could retire soon. The district's location and low resources available did not attract many well-prepared applicants from outside the district; therefore, the superintendent has made it his priority to develop principals from within the ranks of aspiring leaders. Because of the limited number of assistant principalship positions available, the Remote County School System provided training and leadership opportunities for instructional coaches and teacher leaders, but did not target teachers in these development efforts.

Due to the limited resources available to the district leaders, the Remote County School System relied heavily on GLISI—an external organization—for help with principal professional learning and leadership succession planning. At the time of the study, the Remote County School System was actively engaged in multiple programs that GLISI offered for the aspiring leaders, building level leaders, and central office leaders. The aspiring principals participated in the Rising Stars program, while sitting leaders took advantage of various conferences and one-day trainings provided by GLISI during the year. The participants believed that this collaboration with GLISI was most advantageous for the leaders and benefitted the district as a whole. Given that the district could not afford developing such programs by itself, the availability of GLISI programs was a great asset to sitting and aspiring leaders of the Remote County School System.

In spite of high reliance on the externally provided programs and initiatives, the Remote County School System placed a great value on building the leadership capital within the district and believed that locally grown leaders would make the best principals in the district. This belief was evident in the selection and hiring process that favored local applicants. Even the superintendent, who believed that hiring external candidates may be beneficial for the district, acknowledged that in the context of a small system where everyone knows everyone, "you have to play closer to the vest."

In the Remote County School System, the central office was relatively small and most of the decisions were made by the superintendent and his office. This presented both an advantage and a challenge. The advantage of such an approach was that one person was overseeing all processes related to the principalship, ensuring that all of them were guided by the same mission,

vision, and goals. The associated challenge of this approach lay in the personality of a superintendent—if all decisions were made by one person, some of them could go askew.

Overall, the leaders of the Remote County School System acknowledged the importance of timely and relevant professional learning for sitting and aspiring principals and attempted to provide more of ongoing, differentiated, and job-embedded initiatives for their leaders. However, at the time of this study, the changes to the traditional ways of providing professional development were minimal and the approach to planning and providing leader professional learning was mostly reactive in nature (professional learning was covering those topics that the leaders struggled with at the time).

The limitation of the approach to planning principal professional learning and succession adopted by the Remote County School System lies in placing the control over these processes at the discretion of one person—the superintendent. The reliance on the external organization for professional learning and leader succession planning was also limiting in nature because there was no assurance that this (or any other similar organization) would exist the next year to offer these services. Therefore, regardless of the external assistance, school districts should develop their own principal professional development and succession plans.

In summary, Remote County School System started regarding principal professional learning and succession planning more seriously than in the past. Additional resources would help the district to develop stronger internal programs and initiatives; however, limited resources were compensated by partnering with other educational organizations. Effective collaboration with an external organization along with new school-level and district-level initiatives have marked positive changes in the district's approach to ensuring leadership continuity. However, there was still an acknowledged need for more formal ways of addressing principal professional

development and succession. Overall, although the Remote County School System recognized the importance of planning for principal professional learning and succession, central office leaders needed more time and resources to ensure successful leadership continuity in their district.

In the next chapter, the membership categorization analysis of the participants' descriptions of an "effective" principal is presented. This chapter examines the participants' use of membership categorization resources in the descriptions of an "effective" principal that the central office leaders provided in their conversations about principal professional learning and succession. The chapter concludes with a discussion of category bound activities of an "effective" principal as provided by the participants.

CHAPTER 7

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIZATION:

DESCRIBING AN "EFFECTIVE" PRINCIPAL

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the connections between principal succession and professional learning through the analysis of the current practices in leader identification, development, support, and retention in two Georgia school districts. This study situated professional development in the context of principal succession. Three major aspects of this topic were targeted: professional development provided for current administrators; professional development as an instrument for preparing prospective school leaders; and the relationship between professional learning and principal succession. The study was guided by three overall research questions:

1. How do current leader identification, development, support, and retention practices foster principal professional growth and build leadership pipeline?

2. How do the district leaders describe an "effective" principal in conversations on leader professional development and succession planning?

3. In the context of participating districts and school leaders, what is the relationship between principal succession and professional learning?

To address these questions, the researcher sought to understand the building level and central office leaders' experiences of and perspectives about leader succession and professional development provided for current and aspiring principals.

The previous three chapters examined the themes that emerged in relation to seven topics connecting professional development and succession of school principals in the context of two school districts and the cross-case analysis of the districts' approaches to managing principal professional development and succession. This chapter uses membership categorization analysis (MCA) to extend the analysis by examining the descriptive practices used by the central office leaders to portray an effective principal during the research interviews. By looking at how this talk was produced by participants within the research setting, it is possible to look at how the "identities" of "effective principals" are routinely talked into being by educational leaders whose daily work entails selecting principals, working with principals, and preparing principals to be "effective."

By looking at the common-sense ways in which speakers organized these descriptions, following Baker (2002) and Silverman (2006), it is possible to examine the concept of "effective principalship" in the contexts of these school districts though the analysis of interview accounts because by "analyzing how people talk to one another, one is directly gaining access to a cultural universe and its content of moral assumptions" (Silverman, 2006, p. 145).

Membership Categorization Analysis

Ethnomethodology examines the "resources and methods with which ordinary members go about making sense of the settings, the people, and the events they encounter" (Baker, 2002, pp. 777-778). As one of the methods used in the ethnomethodological inquiry, MCA is frequently regarded as a methodological approach examining the categorization in interaction (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002; Watson, 1997). Wooffitt (2005) summarized:

> The ways in which categories are selected and their interactional implications was a feature of Sacks' early work in CA [conversation analysis]. He showed that categories are not neutral labels with which to describe ourselves and other people: they are what Sacks calls 'inference rich': we all have a stock of culturally available, tacit knowledge

221

about categories and their members. When we come to see a new person as a member of a particular category, the normative expectations associated with that category become available as an inferential resource by which we can interpret and anticipate the actions of this particular person. (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 100)

As King (2010) asserted, the original idea of MCA developed by Sacks was later "extended into a methodological programme that examines how members of society categorize themselves, others, and locations" (p. 2). Similarly, the original idea of using MCA to examine naturally-occurring talk has evolved to include interview data as "data in which accounting is done, but which does not focus on the interview itself as a site of talk-in-interaction" (Schegloff, 2007, p. 464).

MCA has been used to examine interaction to analyze sense-making of those involved in the conversation and to analyze written texts reflecting the interaction. When applied to the interview data, MCA treats transcripts as accounts that are "best understood as sense-making work through which participants engage in explaining, attributing, justifying, describing, and otherwise finding possible sense or orderliness in the various events, people, places, and courses of action they talk about" (Baker, 2000, p. 781). King (2010) defined MCA as a "form of conversation analysis that explores how individuals make sense of and order their social worlds, particularly how they constitute social actions through making categorizations and attributions" (p. 1). Further provided are the definitions of the key terms involved in the process of conducting membership categorization analysis.

Membership categories. Membership categories are the personal categories describing people, places, or activities (Baker, 2000; Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002). Examples of membership categories are: 'mother,' 'teacher,' 'school,' or 'library.' Housley and Fitzgerald (2002) asserted that originally categories were conceptualized as personal categories regarded as

methods for sense-making by Sacks (1992). However, the original ideas were later expanded to examine non-personal categories, for instance, social structure or family (Coulter, 1983).

Membership categorization devices. A membership categorization device (MCD) is a collection of categories, their attributes, actions, and rules of application (King, 2010). Schegloff (2007) asserted that an MCD was characterized by the way people did descriptions; specifically, by their word selection or "how speakers come to use the words they do, and how that informs the hearing that the talk gets from the recipient" (p. 463). Sacks (1992) described a MCD as a collection of membership categories plus rules of application. Some examples of MCD are family (mother, father, children, aunt, etc.), classroom (teacher, children, blackboard, textbook), and house (owner, window, floor, carpet, etc.). The same category can belong to different MCDs—for instance, category "children" in the above examples belongs both to MCD 'family' and 'stage of life.'

Category bound activities. Closely linked to MCD are the category bound activities (CBA), which are the actions or "predicates" associated with a certain category as those that are normative for that category (King, 2010). CBAs help the hearer to interpret the utterance or the text correctly. In a classic example of Sacks (1992), "The baby cried; the mommy picked it up," the reader understands that the activity 'crying' is bound to the category 'baby,' just as the activity 'picking up' is bound to the category 'mother.' In other words, the hearer knows the activities that are normatively performed by different categories and that knowledge allows them to understand the speaker correctly. To illustrate these concepts, an example of MCD 'teacher' is provided (see Table 7.1).

Thus, the focus of MCA is on the membership categories, actions associated with these categories (category bound activities or predicates), and the groups or collections of categories

(membership categorization devices). In turn, major categories are the categories of person, place, or activity (Baker, 2000). The present study used membership categorization analysis to examine how the building and central office leaders from two districts participating in the study in their interviews constructed the category of an 'effective principal' through their descriptive practices. In the language of MCA, 'effective principal' was a "membership category" and relevant "category bound activities" or "predicates" were explored through the analysis of the participating leaders' interview accounts.

Table 7.1

Example of a School as a Membership Categorization Device

Concept	Definition	Example
MCD	*Membership categorization device* (MCD) is any collection of membership categories plus rules of application	School
MC	*Membership category* (MC) is a collection of labels included in an MCD (e.g., these might include people, places, or activities)	Teacher; student; lesson; schedule; homework; bell; classroom, library
CBA	*Category bound activities* (CBAs) are the activities associated with a certain category or membership categorization device	Teaching; learning; grading; testing; doing homework

Findings

   Describing an "effective" principal. In their descriptions of an effective principal, central office leaders outlined a set of characteristics of a successful school principal. Being an instructional leader was an important trait; however, an effective principal would also possess other characteristics in addition to managing curriculum and instruction. This section presents the ethnomethodological analysis of 10 interview transcript excerpts (one with each of the

central office leaders from the two school districts in the study) that examined how the central office participants conceptualized an effective principal. These interview excerpts were purposefully selected as they provided information rich accounts in which the participants provided descriptions of an "effective principal" while orienting to interview questions about principal professional learning and succession.

Principal with a track record of being an effective leader. Dr. Hopkins, the executive director for leadership development of the Illustrative County School System (see Excerpt 7.1), started describing desired qualifications in a principal by stating the legal requirements to be hired for a position—the "minimum certification" (line 3).   The main part of the description is composed of juxtaposing the requirements needed to become an assistant principal (lines 7-13) and those required to be a principal (lines 15-20).

Excerpt 7.1. Dr. Paul Hopkins: Looking for Evidence of Effective Leadership

```
1      I: What are you looking for as far as desired characteristics and qualifications in
2         a principal?
3      R: Ok (.) well (.2) obviously minimum certification (.2) being able to meet that
4         (.5) Um (.) beyond that um we are looking I go back to the knowledge skills
5         (.) and attitudes
6      I: Hm-mm (.) right
7      R: for an entry level position of assistant principal (.5) we are not looking for
8         perfection um (.2) in all of the skill dimensions
9         we are not looking for a person to have um you know all of the desired
10        attributes attitudes (.) dispositions (.) but we are looking for preponderance
11        of those so um for entry level (.5) we are looking for preponderance of
12        evidence that the person has um the knowledge (.2) skill and talent to do that
13        entry level  = work
14     I:              = hmmmm
15     R: at the principalship level um that is really um key to quite a bit more
16        So (.) um (4.0) that preponderance at that level would be can I see um
17        tangible (.) measurable (.3) observable evidence um do I have artifacts that I
18        can see that the person has been able over time to demonstrate sound (.3)
19        judgment (.) set instructional direction (.3) Been a fit for leadership with
20        = teamwork (.5)
21     I: = Hmm
22     R:  So (.) again (.) just um just turned up several degrees I suppose (2)
```

Describing the requirements for the assistant principalship, Hopkins stated "we are not looking for perfection" (lines 7-8), implying that the search for the principal was closer to looking for a perfect candidate. In the same segment, Hopkins listed general terms like "attitudes," "dispositions," "skill and talent," but did not provide examples of those attitudes, skills, or dispositions. Because the interviewer did not pose follow-up questions about these attitudes, skills, and dispositions, they were taken as "understood" in the context of this interview.

In the second part of this excerpt, Hopkins described the characteristics required for a principalship. To build the description of an effective leader, Hopkins used contrast structures and lists. Hopkins used a three-part list consisting of the accountability language "tangible, measurable, observable evidence" (line 17) to show that he and the district were results-driven and positioned this kind of "evidence" as a criterion by which he assesses principals. To underline the difference in expectations for the assistant principals and for the principals, Hopkins summarized, "just turned up several degrees" (line 22) and used "again" for emphasis.

In this part of a conversation, Hopkins alternated between 'we' as a school district (lines 7, 9, 10, 11) and 'I' (lines 16, 17). The use of "I" was more frequent in the segment on requirements for the principalship, suggesting that Hopkins was more intimately involved in selecting the principals. Also, by using "I" in this text, Hopkins was taking responsibility for the decision making process. The involvement of the interviewer was minimal after the opening question; in the remainder of this segment, the interviewer participated only by saying "hmmm" to denote presence and attention. Moreover, the lack of follow-up and clarifying questions from the interviewer indicated a shared understanding of the topic between the researcher and the participant.

Hopkins offered three category bound activities (CBAs) related to the category of an effective leader: (1) demonstrating sound judgment; (2) setting instructional direction; and (3) supporting teamwork. He outlined both cognitive and psychological characteristics needed in an effective principal, but he did not provide many exact examples of those characteristics. In summary, Hopkins used accountability language to describe expectations to emphasize that Illustrative County School District was a results-driven system that was looking for concrete "evidence" of a track record of being an effective leader before appointing somebody as a principal in the school district.

Principal as a perfect fit to the school. Dr. Norris, assistant superintendent of the Remote County School System (see Excerpt 7.2), described an effective principal as a leader who was the perfect fit for the specific school and for the district, overall. Norris emphasized that the district was looking for the best possible candidate by using adjectives in the superlative: "the most successful" (line 3), "the perfect job" (line 4), and "the perfect fit" (line 5). In this excerpt, Norris used "we" rather than "I" to position her description (lines 1, 6, 11). In fact, although Norris was in the position next to the superintendent in the decision-making chain, her description of selecting an effective principal was presented from a "we" perspective, showing the collective approach to selecting principals for the district.

Excerpt 7.2, part 1. Dr. Susan Norris: Looking for a Perfect Fit

```
1        R: And we also always ask one final question (.) you = know (.)
2        I:                                                  = hmm
3        R: tell us why you are the one (.5) why are you the most successful candidate
4            that we should have today (.4) you know why is this the perfect job for you
5            and why are you the perfect fit for Remote County (.5)
```

In her description, Norris used contrast structures to differentiate between the principalship and the assistant principalship (lines 7-8) to show what the district is looking for and what they do not want in their principals (lines 11-16). In the second part of this description, Norris came back to looking for an 'ideal' candidate and suggested three CBAs describing an effective principal: (1) having relevant experience; (2) demonstrated expertise; and (3) able to utilize the skills. The last CBA pointed to the necessity for observable evidence with the participant's use of the accountability language.

Excerpt 7.2, part 2. Dr. Susan Norris: Looking for a Perfect Fit

```
6       R: We want individuals ideally who have had some relevant experience in
7          the kinds of work that we um know are essential to the success of a Principal
8          Our experience as an assistant principal (.) is certainly attractive credential
9          but not necessarily required (.5)
10      I: Hmmm
11      R: we are really looking for skills and competencies (.3)
12         those things you know that we are in the process of very strategically
13         identifying (.5) and demonstrated expertise in those things (.5)
14      R: not just someone who can describe them or can talk about them in (.2) an
15         interview process but we've actually been able to see them utilize those skills
16         in some capacity (3)  That of course is ideal (.5)
17      I: Hmmm
```

In this description, Norris did not provide many examples of actual skills, abilities, or dispositions needed to be an effective principal. Rather, she used the terms (i.e., kinds of work essential to the success of the principal; skills, and competencies). Furthermore, Norris did not elaborate on the skills, abilities, and knowledge as she assumed the researcher understood what she was saying, indicating a "shared understanding of the topic" by the two of them. The interviewer in this excerpt was very passive, merely offering "hmmm" to demonstrate that she was listening and following what was being communicated. Overall, this description focused on

looking for an 'ideal' candidate that would be a 'perfect' match for to the school, but would also

have relevant experience and the needed skills and competencies to be a principal. However, the

types of the previous experiences, skills, and knowledge were not elaborated upon during the

interviews.

Principal able to address the needs of the school. The superintendent of the Illustrative

County School System, Mr. Adams, offered a somewhat similar description of an effective

leader to that of Dr. Norris (see Excerpt 7.3). However, rather than looking for a perfect fit (as

suggested by Norris), Adams promoted matching the candidate's knowledge, skills, and talent

with the needs of the school. Adams framed his description as an account of his process for

principal selection in the Illustrative County School System.

Excerpt 7.3. Mr. Lance Adams: Matching the Person and the School

```
1      R: What we've got to do is match the person's knowledge (2) Skills and talent
2          with what that school really needs
3      I: Hmmm
4      R: and I contend that's tough to do (.) but you do the best you can do with it (.5)
5          Um (.) I also think that um you have to um (3.0) avoid getting the job done
6          for example (.) there are openings and now give them the recommendations
7          for the people that's been recommended to me (.5) but you just don't rush
8          personnel decisions (.6) most important thing we do is select leaders (.) and
9          so 95% your problems upfront in the selection process but getting the right
10         People (2) Um and think about it (.) talk about it a little bit to make sure you
11     I: Hmmm
12     R: are looking (2) for example (.) we are opening 2 new high schools this time
13         a tremendous responsibility is running the high school
14     I: Ah-hah
15     R: with all the things that have to go on
16         You do need somebody that's outgoing (.2) a good communicator (.3) but
17          you also need somebody who can do other things
18     I: Hm
19     R: I would want to um (3.0) have some information about that person's
20         instructional leadership (.) um something about their um (3.0) work ethics
21          something about their um managerial abilities
22         Um (.2) how (3) what jobs they had (.2) how successful were they…
```

Adams emphasized the importance of selecting the 'right' people and not doing it in a hurry just to fill the position (lines 4-10). Describing an effective principal for the high school in the district that has an opening, Adams used a three-part list of the characteristics of an effective principal: outgoing; good communicator; and a person who can do other things (lines 16-17). "Other things" were further stated as CBAs of an effective principal: being an instructional leader; having work ethics; being a good manager; and having been successful at the previous positions he/she held. Overall, this description started as an account of matching the characteristics of an application with the needs of the school, and ended with a list of necessary skills and characteristics that a successful applicant would have to be appointed by him as a principal in the Illustrative County School System. Thus, lists were used by the participant as a resource to develop an accurate description of the position.

Aspiring principal identified as a leader. Mr. Brown, associate superintendent of the Illustrative County School System, started his account of an effective principal with the description of instructional leadership as a desired characteristic in a principal (see Excerpt 7.4). Brown's choice of word indicated that he was looking for "an interest in instruction" (lines 1-2) and was "getting a sense" of a candidate's potential as an instructional leader (lines 4-5), as opposed to the previous participant who was looking for measurable and observable evidence to prove that an aspiring leader was an instructional leader.

In addition to instructional leadership, Brown added communication and motivating others as desired characteristics in a principal. Hence, this account offered three CBAs of an effective principal in the context of the Illustrative County School System: (1) being an instructional leader; (2) being a good communicator; and (3) being able to motivate other people.

In the second part of his description, Brown focused on the context of the Illustrative County School System that framed leader identification and selection. In this account, Brown pointed to the fact that it was not easy to be appointed for a principalship in a system with "a lot of good leaders" (line 12) and to get in the seat, one had "to get attention" (line 14). Brown used a five-part list to delineate CBAs related to the ways to get attention and be identified as a possible leader. Those activities included: working hard at your local school; being there on a daily basis; participating in an action team; stepping forward; and serving on district committees (lines 15-19). To end the interview, Brown repeated the importance of stepping forward as a necessary requirement to be considered for a principalship position in the district.

Excerpt 7.4, part 1. Mr. Albert Brown: Instructional Leadership

```
1        R: Well the first one that always comes to mind do you profile with an interest
2           in instruction (.4) are you an instructional leader (.5) because I think
3           easily people through their behaviors (.5) through their conversations
4           you get a sense of whether instruction is something that they seem to be
5           Comfortable with and seem to prioritize in terms of what their background
6           = might be
7        I: Hmmm
8        R: The other thing obviously is communication (.1) in other words how well
9           can you communicate including motivate other people in terms of you know
10          what you say and what you do (.6) your example as well
11       I: Hmmm
```


Excerpt 4, part 2. Mr. Brown: Being Identified as a Leader

```
12       R: We got a big system (.7) a lot of good leaders (.) the best way to get
13          attention (.7) And that's where it comes back to the Central Office or
14          District level opportunities to lead (.) that's the way to get attention (.5)
15          work hard at your local school (.) be there on a daily basis (.3) but when
16       I: Ah-hah
17       R: you have that opportunity to participate in a cross functional action team you
18          need to step forward (.2) if you have the opportunity to be on a District level
19          committee to score a Gateway assessment (.4) step forward (2)  Because
20          that's going to get you noticed more than what you say it's what you do (2)
```

231

This description was closed with an assertion that getting "noticed [was more important] than what you say it's what you do" (line 20). This statement was contradicting the perception claims of "getting a sense" about the candidate's capabilities (line 4) and was calling for the observable evidence of the candidate's leadership skills. Overall, this description also used terms that were taken to be understood by the interviewer (i.e., instructional leadership, action team); the interviewer did not clarify any of these terms and indicated that she was actively listening by occasional continuers "hmm" and "ah-hah."

Principal as the data leader. While Brown mentioned instructional leadership as a necessary characteristic for an effective principal, Dr. Atkins, the superintendent of the Remote County School System, focused his description on one aspect on instructional leadership—being a data leader. Atkins started his description (see Excerpt 7.5) by referring to the previous interview (line 1) and got a confirmation from the interviewer (lines 2, 4) that she remembered that part of a conversation that took place on the previous day. Atkins used a contrast structure to differentiate between the 'old' and the 'new' requirements for a principal.

Atkins alluded to the need for principals to be instructional leader when he noted, "and we are asking them to be leaders rather than traditional managers" (line 7). The most important CBA of an instructional leader was being data-savvy. Atkins built the description of a principal as a data leader by providing a linear description of CBAs related to a data leader. Principals as data leaders are aware of the need to analyze data (line 10); they are looking at data (line 9); know their data (line 20); and take necessary actions and performance interventions to close the achievement gap (line 20-21). This description of an effective "new" leader was contrasted with the description of the old managerial-style principals, who "were on autopilot" (line 11), and "weren't doing specific things … to close the achievement gap" (line 14-16). Atkins closed his

account by asserting that all the principals in the district were expected to be data leaders in their schools and to take actions that would improve student performance, making data leadership an important CBA of an effective principal in an accountability context.

Excerpt 7.5. Dr. Eric Atkins: Being a Data Leader

```
1       R: Yesterday we were talking about a different = ah (.5) type of leadership
2       I:                                            = ah-hah
3       R: that is needed in order to (.2) you know (.5) do this new work
4       I:                                            = ah-hah
5       R: and looking at (.1) you know (.5) the roles of leadership and how that's
6          changed and (.2) you know (.2) what we are asking our folks to do (4)
7       And we're asking them to be leaders rather than the traditional = managers (3)
8       I:                                                      = ah-hah
9       R: And talk about (.5) you know (.3) looking at data and you know (.) again (.)
10         trying to ah (.5) raise that sense of awareness (.2)
11         because we had a lot of folks who were on autopilot (3) and ah (.) you know
12      I: Hmm
13      R: They were just ah (.5) you know (.5) they were conscious of their scores but
14         they really weren't doing specific things (.5) not in all cases (.5)
15         I'm not stereotyping here (.5) but in a lot of cases
16         we weren't really working to close the achievement gap (3)
17      R: we expect all of our Principals to be uh (.)
18         data analysis leaders in their = building (3)
19      I:                              = ah-hah
20      R: you have to know your data in order to begin to look at process interventions
21         or uh (.) performance interventions that would affect the changes you need
22         to have to improve performance (.6)
```

Principal focused on results. The description of an effective principal framed by the high-stakes demands was also given by Ms. Nicholson, the director of leadership development of the Illustrative County School System (see Excerpt 7.6). Nicholson started her account by asserting that the school district had a clear description of those skills and abilities that characterized an effective principal and believed it was a "real strength" of the school district. To support this assertion, Nicholson readily listed the CBAs of an effective principal: (1)

focusing on results; (2) valuing accountability; (3) having high energy; (4) being able to energize others; (5) being able to see the results of their actions; (6) being able to build and sustain relationships; and (7) valuing relationships.

In this account, Nicholson alternated between "I" and "we," but was clear to point out that by using "we" she referred to the district, or district leadership teams, and using "I" she expressed her own thoughts about the ways and practices of the district. This description differs from the previously analyzed ones as Nicholson was not only repeating that the district had clearly defined characteristics of an effective principal (lines 2, 16-17), but also placed the superintendent as the person central to defining an 'effective principal' to ensure that the district had effective or "quality" leaders in place (lines 2, 15).

Excerpt 7.6. Ms. Dana Nicholson: Focusing on Results

1	R: I think that on one of the real <u>strengths</u> of our school system is
2	that our superintendent made it really <u>clear</u> what the quality-plus leader is
3	I: Yes
4	R: It's a person who focuses on results (2) Who values accountability
5	um has high energy and is able to energize others (1) Um (.) has um is able
6	to see results from their action build and sustain relationships they value
7	Relationships (.6) So I think because he's defined it so clearly um and talks
8	about all leadership staff so often about that.
9	R: We even have little cards with our name badges so they are in front of our
10	face all the time (.2) So I certainly think that that is where we begin
11	I: Ah-hah
12	R: is with those characteristics that whole idea is that you can come on board
13	as a quality leader (,) there are certain expectations that you may have and
14	your goal is to become a quality-plus leader (.6) that you add value to the
15	Organization (2) So I think he's made it very clear in his definition
16	of what the quality-plus leader in the Leader Academy and that is
17	in front of you all the time of what the expectations are (3.0)

Another interesting aspect of this excerpt is the use of a word "quality" when referring to a leader. Not only did Nicholson take it for granted that the researcher understood the meaning

of this Illustrative County language, but she also pointed out that the district was hiring "quality leaders" (lines 13), with an expectation of them growing to "become quality-plus leader[s]" (line 14). Such language choice illustrated that the district aimed to select only the best applicant and to continually develop them in the principal's seat.

Principal as a technology leader. The director of human resources of the Remote County School System, Dr. Jones, centered her description of an effective principal on two important characteristics: being data-savvy and technologically-savvy (see Excerpt 7.7). The first part of this account somewhat mirrored the description offered by the superintendent of this district (Excerpt 7.5) with the focus on data leadership.

Excerpt 7.7. Dr. Barbara Jones, Being a Technology Leader

```
1       R: just in a general statement we need somebody that can (.2) really look
2          at the data and drill the data down to the skill's level to say (.5) you = know
3       I:                                                              = Ah-hah
4       R: you may really do a good job of teaching math but when you drill down the
5          data (.5) the kids don't know how to do double digit subtraction for example
6          And so (.3) how are you going to address that need and when do you teach
7          that skill and if you teach it at the very beginning of the year (.) maybe
8          right before testing you need to go back and review that (3)
9          That is not something that comes naturally to some people
10         people but that's something that our Principals need to know (3)
11      I: OK
12      R: Our Principals need to be very technological savvy (.5)
13          they need to be able to look at the big picture (.5)
14          and they need (.5) major make sure that they know how to use technology
```

Jones suggested two CBAs of a data leader: looking at the data and drilling the data down to the skill level (lines 1-2). This description of a process associated with being a data-savvy leader suggested that principals would be able to take actions based on the data from the school to improve student learning and achievement. Jones further asserted that being data-savvy was

not a skill that all educators had, but stated "that is something that our principals need to know" (line 10), emphasizing the importance of this skill to the school system and indicating alignment with the district's goal to improve student achievement.

The second part of this account listed three CBAs of an effective principal in the context of the Remote County School District: (1) being technologically savvy; (2) being able to look at the big picture; and (3) knowing how to use technology (lines 12-14). The fact that being a technology leader was emphasized twice indicated its importance to this participant and also was a potential indication that not all principals in the districts were technologically-savvy. Finally, the choice of the language such as "need to be" and "need to be able to" (lines 12-14) indicated that these characteristics were desired but may not have been demonstrated by all the current principals in the district.

Principal as a community leader. Dr. Long, the chief academic officer of the Illustrative County School System, started his description of the qualifications needed to be an effective principal by indicating that there were many of them: "let me see if I can hit a few of them" (line 4). Similarly to other participants, Long offered a list of CBAs of an effective leader: focusing on student achievement; having passion for kids; and loving education (lines 5-6). These characteristics were necessary for another CBA of an effective principal, "inspiring others" in the building.

Long finished the first part of his description asserting that these CBAs were innate qualities, "something that you can't really teach." The second part of this description focused on describing an effective principal as a community leader, able to "get out into the community" and "get your community support" (line 12-13). The remainder of this description offered an

extensive list of CBAs of an effective principal, supporting Long's original assertions about the

multiple qualities that an effective leader possessed.

Excerpt 7.8, part 1. Dr. John Long: Being Focused on Student Achievement

```
1       I:  OK.  As far as desired characteristics and qualifications of applicants for
2            administrative positions in Illustrative (.) what are those desired
3            characteristics and qualifications?
4       R: Ah (.) that's a good question (2)  Let me see if I can hit a few of them
5          Ah (.) you know (.) I think ah (.2) a focus on student achievement (.2) and I
6          think that goes with the passion for kids and the love for education (3)
7          You know (.3) all of that together (.4)
8       I: Hmm
9       R:  If our Principals don't have that (.) ah (.) it's hard to ask them to find and
10          inspire everybody else to want to do that in their schools (.9)
11          Ah (.2) that's something that you can't really teach (1)
```

Excerpt 7.8, part 2. Dr. John Long: Being a Community Leader

```
12      R: Ah (.) we talk about ah (.2) being able to get out into the community and ah
13         and get your community support (2) Ah (.) being able to organize a
14         leadership team (2)  Being able to recognize ah good behaviors so you can
15         hire good teachers (.3) Ah (.) being a good facilitator (.4)
16      I: Mmmm
17      R: Ah (.2) being able to let go of a few things and ah (.5) let other people
18         have those leadership roles within a school (.) but still being able to go back
19         and inspect what is happening and determine if there is a gap there or not
20         And you know (.) I think really (.) everything from there down is you know
21      I: Ah-hah
22      R: it' gets a lot smaller in relation to what we just talked about on a large scale
23         the capacity and that real passion for education (2)
24         Ah (.5) be able to develop that vision ah within the school
25         or with teachers (.) interpersonal skills (2)  Things like that (.)
```

In this excerpt, category predicates of an effective principal included: being able to

organize a leadership team; being able to recognize a good behavior; hiring good teachers; being

a good facilitator; delegating responsibilities; being able to oversee the processes in the schools;

having a passion for education; developing the school vision; and having interpersonal skills

237

(lines 13-25). Long finished this account with "things like that" (line 25), indicating that the list

was incomplete and there were other important characteristics that an effective leader possessed.

To communicate this description, Long used "I" and "we" interchangeably as he structured his

description as an extended list of qualities of an effective principal.

      Principal having a passion. Dr. Vargas, the chief human resources officer of the

Illustrative County School System, further elaborated the idea of having a passion for education

and for working with people as an important quality in a principal (see Excerpt 7.9). Vargas

started her description by asserting that being certified was taken for granted and did not

consider it a benefit. She finished this section saying, "just to be honest with you" to which the

researcher answered "OK" to acknowledge that the opinion was registered.

      Vargas suggested three major CBAs related to being an effective leader: having passion

for working with people; knowing curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and being data-

savvy. First, Vargas elaborated on the importance of passion to being an effective principal

because "if you don't have passion for people and kids, you are in the wrong business" (lines 12-

13). This description not only positioned having passion for working with people and children as

a CBA of a principal, but it also situated this predicate as an important requirement to be

appointed as a principal. The second CBA of an effective leader suggested by Vargas was

"knowing curriculum, instruction, and assessment" (lines17-18); this predicate was also

suggested as an important one as indicated by the choice of the wording "you've got to know"

(line 15).

      The third and final CBA was being able to work with data, presented in a form of a three

part list: being able to disaggregate data; to read data, and to turn that data into information,

presumably to make data-driven decision that will positively impact their schools, teachers, and

238

students. These major or 'global' predicates were supplemented with additional CBAs of an effective leader: being able to build community; to energize people; and to manage resources (line 23-24). Overall, this description focused on the 'global' characteristics of effective principals. The participant was checking for the listener's comprehension by asking "OK?" at the end of every subsection in this abstract (lines 13; 18). The researcher invariably responded with "ah-hah" to demonstrate comprehension of what was communicated.

Excerpt 7.9. Dr. Ann Vargas: Having a Passion for Education

```
1      I: Mmm… So what overall are the desired characteristics and
2          qualifications of applicants?
3      R: Ok (.3) everybody has to be certified (.4) I don't even count it any more (2)
4          Everybody has to have those credentials
5      I: Right
6      R: A lot of people think that if they come to the table with credentials
7          Plus one (2) for me it's a Zero
8          Everybody in the applicant pool has to have that (.)
9          So I don't even count that anymore (.5) just to be honest with you
10     I: OK
11     R: First of all I look for a person who has passion for kids (2) You got to have
12         Passion (.6) you don't have passion for people and kids (.2) you are in a
13         wrong business (.2) And that has to come out in the process (.3) ok?
14     I: Ah-hah
15     R: Second, you've got to know instruction (2) You got to know curriculum
16         and instruction and assessment (.4) those three things run together that's a
17         common thread between the linkage of instruction (.) curriculum (.) and
18         Assessment (2) Ok?
19     I: Ah-hah
20     R: You've got to be able to disaggregate data (.) you've got to be able to read
21         data you've got to be able to take that data and turn that data into
22         information (.) You've got to be able to build community (.3) you've got to
23         be able to build Community (2) You've got to be able to energize people
24         (3.0) and you've got to be able to manage resources (4.0)
25         Those are some global pieces there (.)
26     I: Right
```

Principal as a team player. Dr. Rowe, the area superintendent of the Illustrative County

School System, included in his description of an effective principal (see Excerpt 7.10) several of

the characteristics and qualities that were mentioned by other leaders in the study. Like other

participants, Rowe noted the importance of being an instructional leader because "it all starts

with instruction" (line 1).

Excerpt 7.10. Dr. Howard Rowe: Being a Team Player

```
1      R:  All starts with instruction (.2) So I think their instructional focus (.) their (.)
2           their um ability to bring a team together to focus on teaching and learning
3           their um their understanding of the Illustrative components as far as AKS (.)
4           the curriculum (.5) the assessment program um how all those pieces work
5           together I think um that's (.4) the first piece (2) I mean that's number one
6      R:  Hmmm
7      I:  And then you know after that (.) it's how well does that person interact
8           you know or operate in the divisional structure (.4) you know with the
9           support pieces that are in place (.9) Um how well do they work with human
10          resources how well do they work with facility (.3) how well do they work
11          with the technology folks um I think is (.) is (.) is a key piece (.4) So the next
12          part then is just (.5) just what's their track record (.8) You = know?
13     I:                                                          = Ah-hah
14     R:  Just what have they done and accomplished (.) and in what role were they in
15          when they did (.3) when they did ah produce results and um through their
16          own leadership and I think that those are the (.3) you know (.3) those are the
17          two big things (.5) I think that you know um I think the next piece and the
18          way that I looked at it from you know who was going to replace me was (.4)
19          OK (1) how was the community going to accept this person (.3) how was the
20          teaching staff going to accept this person (.) how were the students going to
21          accept this person (.2) so I think that (.3) I think that um that is a (.7) that's a
22          very important component (.4) especially if you want things to continue in
23          the direction they're = going (.)
24     I:                    = Um hmmm
```

After instructional leadership requirements have been met, Rowe believed that an

effective principal was familiar with the structure of the Illustrative County and was able to

effectively work with different divisions, or, in other words, be a good team player in the overall

context of the school system (lines 7-12). Another important predicate of an effective principal was a demonstrated track record of being effective in the previous positions the person has had (lines 12-16). Finally, Rowe was looking at the response of the community, staff, and the students to the appointment of this person as the principal of in a school.

Overall, this description combined different CBAs that were pointed out by other participants from the same school district (e.g., being an instructional leader; being a good fit for a specific school, etc), showing that there was an alignment between the descriptions provided by the participants from the same school district. Further discussion of the major predicates characterizing an effective principal and the trends in the participants' use of membership categorization resources is provided in the following section.

Participants' Use of Membership Categorization Resources

In this chapter, the analysis focused on the interview excerpts of the participants' descriptions of an effective principal in the contexts of their school districts. Although different in focus and content, all of these excerpts were participant-centered descriptions. The involvement of the researcher was minimal. Some excerpts (i.e., excerpt 1, 8) started with the researcher's opening question; other excerpts provided the participants' reflections on the topic. In all of these data excerpts, the involvement of the interviewer was minimal, largely reduced to "hmm" and "ah-hah" to demonstrate understanding and to encourage the participant to continue. Also, at no point were the participants asked to clarify the terms they used, indicating a shared understanding of what was being discussed in the interviews.

As to the context of these conversations, all excerpts were taken from the interview on succession that addressed the desired characteristics and qualifications for a principal. In these descriptions, participants used seven major membership categorization resources: general and

specific terms; pronouns; contrast structures; lists; process descriptions; language choice; and category predicates. The use of these resources by the participants is further examined in the remainder of this chapter.

General versus specific. Overall, central office leaders in this sample offered general skills and characteristics (e.g., instructional leadership; leadership attitudes; leadership dispositions) that they did not support with specific examples of what this skill or ability may be. These accounts combined global and context-specific characteristics that effective principals should have. Among the global pieces were sound judgment and instructional leadership (as mentioned in almost every excerpt analyzed) and over-encompassing categories of skills like having passion for working with people; knowing instruction, curriculum, and assessment; being able to disaggregate data; and knowing how to build community (excerpt 9). Context-specific skills and abilities were tied to matching the candidate and a school and included relevant experiences (excerpt 2) and success at previous positions held (excerpt 3).

The use of "I" and "we." Overall, no discernable trend on the preferred pronoun used was found as participants used both "I" and 'we' in their descriptions, frequently alternating between the two in the same segment of a conversation. The use of "I" indicated the intimate involvement of the participant in the process of identifying and selecting leaders (excerpt 1, 9) or the personal opinion on the topic discussed (excerpt 6). The use of pronoun "we" typically referred to the district or the district leadership team and indicated the shared decision-making related to principal selection and development (excerpt 5, 6).

Contrast structures. Although they did not appear in every description, the use of contrast structures was quite common in the descriptions analyzed. Two major uses of the contrast structures were found: to compare old and new characteristics of a principalship (excerpt

2, 5) and to contrast the requirements of the principal and the assistant principal (excerpt 1). In these descriptions, contrasting the old and new responsibilities of a principal and the duties of a principal and an assistant principal emphasized that the principal's role has grown in complexity and demands and has became more difficult to maintain in an accountability climate.

Lists. Almost every account used for this analysis contained at least one list. The most common was a three-part list (excerpt 1, 3, 7, 8), although there were also longer lists provided (excerpt 4, 6, 8, 9). Thee-part lists generally provided non-specific, general qualities or traits, while longer lists used the language reflecting the county documentation. This was especially true for the participants from the Illustrative County School District that listed the characteristics and qualities of an effective principal as outlined in their district's job descriptions and other official documents. The lists were used to describe the abilities, characteristics, and skills of a principal, and allowed the participants to enumerate the most important characteristics of an effective principal without elaborating on them.

Sequential ordering of descriptions. In several excerpts, lists served the purpose of describing a process by which effective principals might operate to accomplish specific goals. For example, participants provided multiple items in a list that were structured chronologically in a developmental sequence leading to a specific outcome. For example, the superintendent Atkins (excerpt 5) described the process for being an effective data leader in a series of steps: principals as data leaders are aware of the need to analyze data (step 1); they are looking at data (step 2); know their data (step 3); and take necessary actions and performance interventions to close the achievement gap (step 4). At the end of the process as stated in step 4, a desirable outcome will occur—the school will be closing an achievement gap.

Language choice. Having occurred in the institutional context, all of these accounts used formal language; no jargon or slang was noted. However, these descriptions also included numerous educational terms that were not defined as it was presumed that all present had the same understanding of them (e.g., accountability, instructional leadership). Typically, participants used the *language of evidence* (e.g., proven track record, being successful at the previous position held) and did not rely on their perceptions of somebody's merit. This indicated that the process was "objective" and "merit-based," rather than "subjective" and "preferential."

The use of adjectives in superlative (excerpt 7.2) indicated the search for the best candidate available to assume the principalship. Also, it indicated the pursuit of "quality" which reflected the realities of the context of the accountability era. Further, adjectives in superlative were used as an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), to argue a case for searching for the "ideal," "perfect," or "the best candidate" for an open principal's position. Finally, the accounts from the participants representing two school districts differed as central office leaders from the Illustrative County School District used the language that indicated desired qualifications in the current principals (present reality), while leaders from the Remote County School District described desired characteristics in principals (desired reality).

Category predicates. These accounts presented multiple category predicates or category bound activities of an effective principal. Three major groups of CBAs emerged: characteristics; knowledge; and leadership skills and abilities (see Table 7.2). The notion of principal dispositions was not elaborated although mentioned. The group of characteristics included the innate characteristics (e.g., passion for kids; love of education) and the characteristics that can be observed from the previous career experiences (e.g., being a team player; noticed as a leader, etc.).

Table 7.2

Groups of Category Bound Activities

Characteristics	Knowledge	Leadership Skills and Abilities
• sound judgment • relevant experience • demonstrated expertise • work ethics • previous success • outgoing • good communicator • was noticed as a leader • valuing accountability • high energy • valuing relationships • passion for kids • love of education • interpersonal skills • passion for working with people • being a team player	• being data-savvy • knowing how to use technology • being able to recognize a good behavior; • knowing curriculum, instruction, and assessment; Being a • data leader • instructional leader • a good manager	Able to • set instructional direction • support teamwork • address the needs of the school • motivate other people • focus on results • energize others • build and sustain relationships • look at the big picture • focus on student achievement • organize a leadership team • hire good teachers • be a good facilitator • delegate responsibilities • oversee the processes in the school

The knowledge section included three types of leadership the principal needed to be effective: instructional leadership, data leadership, and managerial abilities. Furthermore, an effective principal has a solid knowledge of technology, data-related work, and of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Finally, the group of leadership skills and abilities included multiple items (e.g., addressing the needs of a school; motivating people; focusing in results; building and sustaining relationships, etc.). In spite of being placed in different groups, these category predicates did not belong to one group exclusively and the groups of characteristics, knowledge, and abilities also overlapped providing a type of triangulation but also pointing to the almost

elusive nature of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that when combined relate to an effective principal. These areas are inter-related in nature and further illustrate the overlapping nature of the effective principal as described by the participants in this study.

In summary, central office participants used different membership categorization resources to describe an effective principal in the context of their school districts. Although their accounts differ in multiple ways, membership categorization analysis allowed the researcher to extract the characteristics, skills, and abilities of an effective principal considered as attributes of "effective leaders" in the context of accountability. The examination of the content of these transcription excerpts yielded shared discursive patterns among the participants' descriptions of an "effective principal." Most notably, these patterns included being an instructional leader, being a "perfect" fit to a specific school, having excellent interpersonal skills, and having solid knowledge about topics related to instructional and managerial leadership.

The analysis of the category bound activities of an effective principal revealed that central office leaders participating in this study believed that being a manager of a school was no longer a major responsibility of a principal; rather, the principal is now expected to be an instructional leader, accountable for student achievement. These findings reflect the major trend in the literature on educational administration noting the changes that occurred to the principalship in the accountability era (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Niesche, 2010; Whitaker, 2003).

The next chapter further expands the discussion on the principalship stemming out of this analysis and situates the findings of this study with respect to the literature on the principalship predominantly covered in Chapter 2. In addition, the next chapter provides the implications of the findings of this study for research, policy, and practice. The chapter concludes with final thoughts and reflections about this study.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Over the last decade, with increased demands of accountability and expanded responsibilities of a principal, the position of a school leader increased in complexity and became less attractive for the applicant pool (Bush, 2008; Catano & Stronge, 2006; Fink, 2010; Niesche, 2010). Challenges associated with principal recruitment, support, and retention resulted in increased interest in and funding for research in these areas. However, in spite of the increase in research on the principalship, principal succession and succession planning in school settings have not been systematically studied (Bengtson, 2010; Fink & Brayman, 2004). One common theme in the literature was found—more research is needed to explore principal succession (Fink, 2011; Fink & Brayman, 2004; Hart, 1991; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Given that there is a gap in the literature about principal succession planning, this study focused on a single aspect of this phenomenon—the role of professional learning in principal succession. The purpose of this study was to explore the connections between principal succession and professional learning through the analysis of the current practices in leader identification, development, support, and retention in two Georgia school districts. This study situated professional learning in the context of principal succession. This study was timely because of the need to explore further the concept of principal succession in light of increased accountability and principal shortages reported nationwide. The study aimed to inform

educational policy and to provide school administrators with information about the ways to improve principal professional learning and leader succession in their schools and districts.

The study was guided by three overall research questions:

1. How do current leader identification, development, support, and retention practices foster principal professional growth and build leadership pipeline?

2. How do the district leaders describe an "effective" principal in conversations on leader professional development and succession planning?

3. In the context of participating districts and school leaders, what is the relationship between principal succession and professional learning?

To address these questions, the researcher used thematic and membership categorization analyses to examine the participants' ideas about leader succession and professional learning provided for current and aspiring principals. This chapter provides a summary of the research design, situates the findings of this study in the literature on principal succession and professional learning, and suggests implications for policy, practice, and future research. The chapter concludes with the researcher's final thoughts and reflections about this study.

Summary of Research Design

This qualitative study was framed within the interpretative qualitative research paradigm and innovated on the methods used for data analysis. The theoretical framework for the study combined symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. Although these frameworks were previously described as congruent and productive for combining in one study (Denzin, 1970; Maynard & Clayman, 2003), in the process of the literature review on principal professional learning and succession, there were no studies found that combined ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism into one theoretical framework. Therefore, this study contributed to the

research on the principalship by using a different theoretical framing to offer a more diverse perspective on interpreting the topic of principal professional learning and succession planning.

The conceptual framework of this study drew from the theories about management succession (Rowan & Denk, 1984), principal succession (Hart, 1991), business model-inspired theories of principal succession (Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003), and principal turnover (Jones & Webber, 2001). This study was informed by the following concepts from principal professional development theories: goals of professional development (Assor & Oplatka, 2003), mission of professional development programs (Peterson, 2002), well-planned nature of effective professional development for school leaders (Evans & Mohr, 1999), and the continuous nature of successful principal professional learning (Engelking, 2008; Metais, 1997; Sorenson, 2005). These concepts helped to frame the themes from individual cases and from the cross-case analysis.

The choice of qualitative methods for this study was reflected in the nature of the research questions, and the methods were aligned with the purpose of the study—to find the connections between principal succession and professional learning, and to examine how the latter informed principal succession planning. Because little literature on principal succession planning in general and on the relationship between professional learning and principal succession in particular was found, a qualitative approach had the potential to inform this field of research through the analysis and comparison of professional learning for principals and its role in principal succession as described by principals, superintendents, and central office personnel.

The experiences of participants related to professional learning and succession planning were narrated in a case study design format. The final representation of the work took the form

of two single case study descriptions followed by a cross-case analysis and a chapter examining

participants' use of membership categorization resources to describe an "effective" principal.

This qualitative study was framed broadly within the research design of a case study

(Creswell, 1998) and was situated in the context of two public school systems in Georgia. Case

study was defined as a type of inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its

real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13); explored a bounded system of a school district; and

examined the case to answer research questions by abstracting the evidence collected from the

case setting (Gillham, 2000). For cross-case analysis, the cases should have similar aspects

(Stake, 2010). In this study, two single cases focused on the same setting (two school systems in

Georgia); had like participants who, at the time of data collection, served as building level or

central office leaders.

The study was based on the data from several sources. This study relied on several

sources of data: interviews, documents (artifacts), and observational data for triangulation and

data saturation purposes (Hakim, 2000; Yin, 2003). Participants were interviewed twice

following interview protocols on principal professional learning and succession.

Although this case study incorporated some descriptive accounts of phenomena of

interest, the researcher used inductive coding to develop categories, which led to themes. For

chapters 4-6, thematic coding was used to construct the themes that were discussed in light of the

research questions. Thematic coding procedure and elaboration of codes, themes, and theoretical

constructs followed the process suggested by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Thus, the codes

were merely used to identify recurring ideas; the themes were developed based on the analysis

and categorization of codes/ideas; and then, the theoretical constructs were identified to combine

the themes into the overarching groups. The documents and artifacts that were collected from

the participants and downloaded from the systems' websites were analyzed using qualitative

content analysis and then the findings from this analysis were incorporated in the themes that

emerged from the thematic analysis.

For chapter 7, membership categorization analysis (MCA) was used to examine the

structure of descriptions, with specific attention paid to descriptions of "effective" principals.

While thematic analysis yielded major themes relevant to the participants' experiences of and

perceptions about principal professional learning and succession, MCA expanded and enriched

the initial analysis by exploring and constructing the categories school leaders used while talking

about professional learning and succession.

MCA focused on a specific issue of central importance to what the participants are

doing—preparing, supporting, and retaining "effective" principals. MCA provided a structural

analysis of the participants' descriptions of a key topic recurring in the interviews—describing

an "effective" principal. Furthermore, examining 'how' participants talked about an effective

principal in the context of professional learning and succession (MCA) enriched the findings of

'what' they said about these topics (thematic analysis). MCA focused on a single aspect of the

leaders' discussions—the descriptive practices used by the central office leaders to portray an

"effective" principal during the interviews.

Membership categorization analysis of the category bound activities of an effective

principal revealed that central office leaders participating in this study described the work of a

principal not in a sense of being a manager of a school; rather, the principal is now expected to

be an instructional leader, prepared to deal with data, and accountable for student achievement.

Therefore, these descriptions showed that the principal's responsibilities were expanded to

include many new roles and skills of a school leader. These findings reflect the major trend in the

251

literature on educational administration noting the changes that occurred to the principalship in the accountability era marked by the move to instructional leadership (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Niesche, 2010; Whitaker, 2003).

Discussion

The findings of this study were both similar and different from the central themes in the literature review framing this analysis. This discussion is presented in several major sections: first, the central themes from the individual cases will be examined in relation to the previous research on the topic; second, the findings of the cross-case analysis are compared to the recent research on principal professional learning and succession; and third, the conclusions that position the study findings in regard to the previous research on the topic are provided.

Principal professional learning and succession in the context of the Illustrative County School District. In the large, urban Illustrative County School System principal professional learning and succession were closely connected. The acknowledged need for strategic succession planning accentuated the need for strategic professional learning. Moreover, professional learning was found to be an inseparable part of major components of principal succession enhancing the applicant pool, increasing principal retention, minimizing leader turnover, and being a part of principal succession planning. These findings supported Fink's (2005) assertion about the importance of connecting leadership succession to identification, recruitment, selection, and development of school leaders.

Furthermore, the findings from the large school district supported the major themes in the literature on principal succession: principal succession should be connected to leadership recruitment, preparation, selection, induction and professional learning (Fink & Brayman, 2004); changing roles and responsibilities of a school principal have affected principal professional

252

development and succession planning (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Griffith, 1999; Shumate et al., 2005; Whitaker, 2003; Winter et al., 2002); succession planning in schools can be described as a search for a certain type of candidates (Roza, 2003); and the principalship overall, and principal professional learning and succession in particular, have been changing in response to accountability-related requirements to measure success (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

The analysis of data from the large urban school district revealed four major themes connecting these two phenomena in the district (see Table 8.1). Although in the course of the literature review there were no studies found that directly examined the connection between principal professional learning and succession, the themes from the Illustrative County School System's data mirrored the findings of the recent studies on principal professional learning and succession (see Table 8.1).

Principal professional learning and succession in the context of the Remote County School District. In the small, rural Remote County School System, principal professional learning and succession has undergone significant changes guided by the new superintendent and his office and, at the time of this study, had the remnants of the old managerial model and a new instructional leadership model. In the context of this school district, the importance of the superintendent for successful principal professional learning and succession was especially noted. This finding resembled the conclusions of Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) and Barty, Thomson, Blackmore, and Sachs (2005) on the importance of the superintendent and superintendent's succession on the success of the school district.

Table 8.1

Situating the Illustrative Case Study Findings in the Literature

Case Study Themes	Recent Research Supporting the Themes
Professional development is a pathway to a stronger and broader applicant pool	Systems should grow their own applicant pool by means of timely professional learning (Fink, 2011).
Targeted and carefully planned professional development increases principal retention	Professional development increases new principal retention (Conley & Cooper, 2011).
Ongoing professional development for leaders at different career stages minimized principal turnover.	The importance of continuous professional development has been emphasized by multiple researchers (Barnett, 2003; Haar, 2004; McCarthy, 1999; Sorenson, 2005).
In the Illustrative County School System, planning of principal professional learning and succession planning are done by the same leadership team, connecting the two phenomena at the level of planning and enactment.	In a school setting, principal professional development is tied to principal succession, induction, and socialization, and works best when guided by the same leadership teams (Normore, 2004a).

The analysis of data from this small rural school district revealed four major themes connecting professional learning and succession in the district (see Table 8.2). The findings from this case study were marked with strong preference for local applicants, locally developed and provided professional learning; and locally hired principals and central office leaders. However, due to the limited resources, this school district collaborated with the external organization, The Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI), to plan and to provide professional development. Although the literature review on the topic did not directly examine the sources of and influences on principal professional development and succession, the themes from the Remote County School System's data were similar to the findings of the recent studies on this topic (see Table 8.2).

In the Remote County School System, principal professional learning and succession were loosely connected, but this link was strengthening as the superintendent introduced new policies and practices in leader development and selection. This finding somewhat resembled the theme from the literature review framing this study—while professional development was described as closely connected to principal succession (Normore, 2004a), an important part of principal succession (Pounder & Crow, 2005), or merely one of the components of the succession process (Hart, 1991), no studies were found that situated principal professional learning in the context of principal succession.

Table 8.2

Situating the Remote Case Study Findings in the Literature

Case Study Themes	Recent Research Supporting the Themes
Leader succession in the district was skewed in favor of internal applicants that were believed to be better prepared.	Internal, non-rotational model of principal succession is based on the premise that all changes in school leadership are done internally (White et al., 2006).
Principal professional development and succession were collaborative efforts of the central office and GLISI.	Collaboration in preparing and developing school leaders between schools and external organizations has been well researched and praised (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Woods et al., 2009).
Describing principal professional development and succession, participants expressed strong preference for locally planned and provided initiatives.	Research on principal professional development emphasizes the importance of school-based professional development. One the most popular models is local job embedded learning (Haar, 2004; Hoffmann & Johnson, 2005; Marshall et al., 2001).
Although initially resisted, policies and practices of the current superintendent improved principal professional development and succession planning in the district.	Research suggests the importance of the superintendent to the overall effectiveness of the school district (Barty et al., 2005; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985).

Principal professional learning and succession: The findings of the cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis compared and contrasted the two systems' approaches to seven topics related to professional learning and succession of school principals: the applicant pool; professional development for aspiring leaders; the hiring process; retention and turnover of leaders; professional development for sitting principals; principal succession process; and planning of principal professional learning and succession. In this section, the highlights of these topics are compared with the previous research on these aspects of the principalship.

Across the two school systems, the participants expressed strong preference for internal applicants and described the applicant pool as younger, stronger, better prepared, and more diverse than in the past, mirroring the expressed need for growing diverse leadership pipeline (Pounder & Crow, 2005). The districts experienced the turnover reason frequently mentioned in the literature—retirement of baby-boomer generation leaders. The two districts in this study asserted that they did not experience the shortages of applicants for the principal positions. This finding was somewhat surprising, being contrary to the major research findings about principal shortages (Crow, 2006; Professional Standards Commission, 2008; Wallace Foundation, 2003). One possible reason for this finding was the sample of systems in this study—one district was small with low principal turnover and the other district was actively developing their leadership pipeline to avoid facing shortages of qualified applicants for the principal positions.

Planning and providing professional learning for aspiring leaders, these two school districts regarded assistant principals as "the main training ground" for the principalship. However, research indicates that assistant principals now are less enthusiastic about becoming principals due to the increased demands and pressures of the position (Gates et al., 2003; Michaelidou & Pashiardis, 2009; Walker & Kwan, 2009). In light of these reports, school

256

districts should not limit their principal training ground to the assistant principals only, but also to extend efforts to include coaches and teacher leaders as potential principal candidates.

Both districts included multiple people in the hiring process and expressed preference for the graduates of alternative, not university-based leader development programs. This finding was not surprising given that the literature is replete with the discussion of the shortcomings of university principal preparation programs (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Normore, 2010). However, while the literature review suggested collaborative efforts of universities and school districts to prepare principals as the most effective approach (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Miller, Devin, & Shoop, 2007), the findings of the present study emphasized the importance the participants placed on stand-alone principal preparation programs, separate from the university-based leadership programs.

Both districts recognized a need for formal principal succession plans and acknowledged the importance of principal succession planning to the success of the district, although to a different degree. These findings supported the literature review findings that succession planning for the principal's position has come to the forefront of attention of researchers as a process essential to school success and sustainability (Fink, 2010; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hart, 1991; Normore, 2004b). Like Normore (2004a), the leaders in the study agreed that inadequate leader succession may lead to disruptions of school life.

Although planned differently, professional development for principals in these two districts was characterized by the shift to job-embedded and continuous professional learning; the belief that principal professional learning was effective; and the likelihood of combining internal and external professional learning. These findings support the idea that professional learning can have high impact on leadership development (Rieckhoff & Larsen, 2011).

257

A single most important form of professional learning was mentoring; this was not surprising as research positions mentoring among one of the most useful forms of principal socialization, support, and professional growth (Cranston et al., 2004; Enrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000; Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengtson, 2012). Other highly valued forms of professional learning were also emphasized as effective in the research: job-embedded learning (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2008; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Haar, 2004; Hoffmann & Johnson, 2005; Marshall et al.,2001); differentiated professional development (Peterson, 2002); and, coaching (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000; Kostin & Haeger, 2006).

Finally, in planning of principal professional learning and succession, both participants from both systems expressed need for formal (written) professional development and principal succession plans; principals felt responsible for growing leaders inside their schools; and principals' opinions and needs were taken into account while planning professional learning and succession in the schools. These findings mirrored the recent finding of Fink (2011) who concluded that effective principal succession planning was central to school's effectiveness and success. As to the principals' role in growing a successor, this study's finding of the principals' growing their successors contradicted the findings of Pounder and Crow (2005) who warned about the risk of low diversity of a principal pipeline if sitting principals were responsible for a succession plan.

The trends that arose from the topics related to principal professional learning and succession in the two districts in the study were summarized into five major themes of the cross-case analysis. These themes were further compared and contrasted with the findings of the recent studies on principal professional learning and succession (see Table 8.3).

Although principal professional learning and succession depend on multiple people, in the context of these districts, the role of the superintendent is key to the success of these processes in the district. This finding added to the previous research on principal professional learning and succession that focused on the processes (i.e., professional development and succession), but did not examine the roles responsible for the planning and providing of professional development and succession. Research reported that a visionary superintendent is central to a school district's success (Charner et al., 1995; Thornton, 2009).

Table 8.3

Situating the Cross-Case Analysis Findings in the Literature on These Topics

Case Study Themes	Recent Research Relevant to the Themes
A key component to the overall success of principal professional development and succession is a visionary superintendent.	A visionary superintendent is central to the school district's success (Charner et al., 1995; Thornton, 2009).
Planning for principal succession, school districts strongly favor the local applicants.	Internal, model of principal succession is based on the internal changes in school leadership (White, Cooper, & Brayman, 2006).
In light of the anticipated principal turnover, growing leaders from within the district is an effective way to ensure leader continuity.	School districts must grow their own leaders (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000; Quinn, 2005)
In the process of growing future principals, school districts express strong preference for the non-university leader preparation programs, tailored to the needs of their districts.	Many innovative leader preparation programs have been developed as an alternative to university-based leader preparation (Ginsberg & Kimball, 2008; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Tomlinson & Holmes, 2001; Tracy & Weaver, 2000).
Leader professional development and succession are tightly connected, as demonstrated by the school districts' practices in the preparation, support, and retention of principals.	There is a connection between principal professional and succession (Barty et al., 2005; Cranston et al., 2004; Johnson, 2001; Hart, 1991).

The findings of this study confirm prior research that positions the superintendent's involvement to be central to the success of principal professional learning and succession planning in a school district. In this study, both large and small school systems expressed strong preference for principals internal to their districts. Participants believed that having experienced teaching in the district, internal candidates were more familiar with the policies, practices, and cultures of their school districts.

According to the four models of principal succession suggested by White, Cooper, and Brayman (2006), the districts in the study preferred an internal, non-rotational model of principal succession with no pressure to rotate, with all the changes made internally. Rotational and open market approaches to principal succession (White, Cooper, & Brayman, 2006) were discarded as injurious to school continuity and success. The districts recognized the importance of developing and selecting suitable school leaders able to deal effectively with current social, political, and economic changes (Huber & Pashiardis, 2008).

Two major themes that emerged from the findings were related to principal preparation. First, districts realized that in light of the anticipated principal turnover, growing leaders from within the district is an effective way to ensure leader continuity. Second, in the process of growing future principals, school districts expressed strong preference for the non-university leader preparation programs, tailored to the needs of their districts. These themes support the concerns for the ineffectiveness of traditional principal preparation as noted in recent studies (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hess & Kelly, 2007). Focusing on managerial issues (Hess & Kelly, 2007) and being too theoretical in nature (Hale & Moorman, 2003), university preparation programs have been blamed for overlooking instructional leadership currently regarded as the major role of a principal. These findings also support the

research trend of promoting leadership academies (Tomlinson & Holmes, 2001; Tracy & Weaver, 2000) and university – school district partnerships for preparing principals (Quinn, 2005).

Due to the limited research in the area of principal succession, very few studies on the topic attempted to link principal professional learning and succession. The literature review on the topic revealed that there is a connection between principal professional learning and succession (Barty et al., 2005; Cranston et al., 2004; Johnson, 2001; Hart, 1991); however, the strength of this connection was not discussed. The findings of the present study suggest that leader professional learning and succession are tightly connected, as demonstrated by the school districts' practices in the preparation, support, and retention of principals. The findings of the data analysis suggested the link between principal professional learning and succession on the level of growing the applicant pool; the hiring process; minimizing the leader turnover and increasing principal retention; and, supporting principals at different career stages. Although planned and executed differently due to the district's size, location, and resources, professional development emerged as an important component of effective principal succession planning and was a part of the principal preparation, support, and retention efforts in the two districts.

The findings of membership categorization analysis of the data also contributed to the literature on the principalship. Being the first study to use this approach in the field (in the process of literature review, no studies were found that used MCA to explore the topics related to the principalship), this study provided a different perspective on how sitting school leaders described an "effective" principal in the context of their school districts. Overall, looking at the "how" of the descriptions (MCA) complemented "what" they said (thematic analysis). In spite of the differences between the participating districts in terms of size, location, and resources,

there was consistency across both school districts as to how accounts of "effective" principals were formulated. This finding further supported recent research that "effective" principalship is just as important in a small district as in a large district.

The participants of the study used the language of accountability fluently, which indicated strong preference for "objective" and "merit-based" rather than "subjective" and "preferential" criteria in principal selection and support. The use of the lengthy lists to describe skills, abilities, and knowledge of an "effective" principal emphasized the growing responsibilities of a principal as indicated in the research on the topic (Bush, 2008; Catano & Stronge, 2006; Fink, 2010). Common discursive patterns among the participants' descriptions of an "effective" principal included being an instructional leader, being a "perfect" fit in a specific school, having excellent interpersonal skills, and having solid knowledge about topics related to instructional and managerial leadership of an effective principal. These findings support previous research suggesting instructional leadership as one of the critically important skills of an effective principal in the accountability era (Fink, 2010; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Implications

In the current accountability environment, principal professional development and succession planning are as important as ever to the success of schools. The findings of this study have implications for further research, policy, and practice of planning and providing principal professional learning and relating these efforts to principal succession. The major implications are discussed in this section.

Implications for research. The findings of this study suggest that more research is needed on the role of professional learning in principal succession. Although the present study

concluded that principal professional learning and succession planning were closely linked, these findings are limited to the context of the two school districts participating in the study. The strength and the nature of this link may be different in other school districts with different demographics, resources, and locality.

This study found that professional learning contributed to principal succession planning by serving as a pathway to developing a stronger and broader applicant pool. Further research is needed to explore specific internal and external professional learning initiatives that contribute to building the leadership pipeline. On the principal's level, this study concluded that targeted professional development increased principal retention and minimized principal turnover. Further examination of how this "targeted" professional learning is planned, selected, and delivered would contribute to the body of research on effective principal professional development.

Another strong theme that emerged from this study was preference for applicants internally developed and provided professional learning, and internally planned leader succession. This finding suggests several major avenues for future research: (1) affordances and challenges to preferring locally grown leaders; (2) the threats to the diversity of the leader applicant pool; (3) the implications for the reconstruction of the university-based preparation programs; and (4) the changing role of supporting educational organizations in helping school districts prepare and retain effective principals.

Finally, this study concluded that a visionary superintendent is crucial to plan, guide, and implement effective and timely principal professional learning and succession efforts. Given that the role of a superintendent has become more complex and demanding (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Fowler, 2009), being "visionary" is one more quality that an effective

superintendent must demonstrate to be successful in a seat. Further research is needed to examine how visionary superintendent leadership is developed and sustained over time and how this may be included in the superintendent's efforts to support preparation, professional learning, and succession efforts to build a pipeline of viable candidates to fill vacant principal positions.

Implications for policy. Currently, to be named a principal or a superintendent, one has to obtain a certain leadership certificate. Such certifications can be issued by the colleges and universities licensed to do that. However, university-based leadership preparation programs have been slow to change to reflect the needs of the modern school and thus, have been criticized as ineffective and inadequate (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Normore, 2010). As an alternative, collaborative partnerships between the universities and school districts have been suggested (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Miller, Devin, & Shoop, 2007).

The findings of the present study show that school districts valued alternative leader preparation over the university based programs. While the university-issued leadership certification was a legal requirement to become a principal, in the process of principal recruitment and selection, central office leaders looked for candidates' participation in alternative leader development academies as a desired characteristic (Remote County School System) or a required condition (Illustrative County School System).

For the policy-makers this poses an interesting dilemma about leadership certification both on the principal and the superintendent levels. Currently, certain school districts that have resources offer their own leader academies (in the present study, Illustrative County School System). In addition, external educational agencies provide their own leader preparation and development programs (in the present study, GLISI). Given the criticisms of the traditional

university-based principal preparation and the success of the district-based and independently-provided leader preparation programs, policy-makers may have to reconsider models of certification for principals and superintendents. Furthermore, this implication is affecting the universities—to compete with school-based, practical, and targeted leader preparation, universities will have to reorganize leadership preparation programs they offer, especially if school districts and independent organizations secure the right to issue leadership certifications to the graduates of their leader development academies and programs.

Implications for practice. The findings of this study also offer implications for practice. First and foremost, the themes from the individual and cross-cases analyses suggest that principal professional learning and succession should be carefully planned and overseen by the superintendent. In spite of differences in size, both districts demonstrated effective collaborative approach to providing principal professional learning, suggesting that school systems may consider adopting (or developing their own model) of collaborative leadership needed for successful principal professional development and succession. A single most important person to guide these processes is a successful and well-respected superintendent.

This study also suggests that principal succession should be carefully planned and overseen by the central office to ensure leadership continuity for the success of schools and the district, overall. Given that professional learning is an essential component of principal succession (as suggested by the findings of the present study), school districts may consider different types and models of professional development to build a stronger and diverse leader applicant pool; to increase principal retention and decrease turnover; and to support sitting principals across their career stages.

Because leader turnover happens in every school district, the district leaders should grow their own leaders, but also be open to the external applicants that may bring new ideas to the district having experienced different preparation and development. While planning professional development, school districts should aim at providing job-embedded and continuous professional learning that was found most effective and most valued by the principals. While this study showed that large districts may be self-sufficient in planning and providing quality professional learning for sitting and aspiring leaders, it also emphasized the possibility of effective collaborations with external entities as shown in the case of a small rural district.

Overall, this study concludes that school districts should regard principal professional learning and succession as closely connected processes that inform and impact each other. Therefore, school districts' practices in the preparation, support, and retention of school leaders should be framed within the concerted efforts uniting principal professional learning and succession planning. Not only such planning has the potential to save time and resources, but it can also yield multiple benefits for teachers, principals, central office leaders, and the district overall.

Concluding Thoughts

Principals are essential to the success of their schools, teachers, and students. Leading their schools, principals impact teacher satisfaction and school culture, and support growth in student achievement through their control over teacher selection and evaluation and their impact on school climate. As key components of the principalship, principal professional learning and succession planning are essential to ensuring leader preparation, retention, and continuity. Over time, these processes have been individually examined and improved. However, the findings of this dissertation study indicate the interconnected nature of these two processes. Therefore,

school district leaders should plan principal succession and professional learning simultaneously, so that these processes may inform each other.

Likewise, principal succession and professional learning cannot be examined separately from other key parts of the principalship: preparation, socialization, support, and retention efforts. For decades, these processes have been regarded separately; however, a more coherent approach to addressing the key processes of the principalship may be more efficient and productive. Such an approach will also save time and resources in the times of budget constraints. In summary, it is important to not only plan and examine principal professional learning and succession, but also to do that efficiently. A coherent approach to addressing principal professional learning and succession planning together may offer such an efficient option for school districts, policy makers, and researchers to consider.

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