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Perceptions from the Principals' Desks: African American Elementary Principals and Reading Curriculum and Instruction in a Central Florida County

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Perceptions from the Principals' Desks: African American Elementary Principals

and Reading Curriculum and Instruction in a Central Florida County

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Ora Lee Mitchell who taught me to

never settle for anything less than the best. You left me sooner than I expected,

but you gave me the strength to finish this race. I can only hope that I made you

proud. Thank you for pushing me when I wanted to give up. Thank you for

allowing me to be Daddy's "baby" even in adulthood. I will always cherish our

times. This PhD is for you!

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Keva L. Mitchell

ABSTRACT

This was a collective case study of African American elementary principals

in a central Florida county. The study intended to discover through qualitative

means, African American elementary principals' perceptions of reading

curriculum and instruction. More specifically, the study was concerned with

discovering and presenting the attitudes, experiences, and beliefs of this specific

population of leaders. The African American principal has the unique perception

of one who has grown-up and been educated in the midst of the European

American dominated system of education, thus making their perceptions of

reading curriculum and instruction relevant to gaining additional knowledge in the

area of literacy leadership.

The findings of the study showed that principals' prior experiences,

whether personal or professional, influenced their perceptions of reading

curriculum and instruction. The principals in the study discussed their lives and

how they valued reading from childhood into adulthood and how these

experiences shaped their schools' reading programs. The themes discovered

from the study were FCAT, NCLB, county reading curriculum, usage of

supplemental reading curriculum, reading as a means of communication,

modeling, acquisition and application of knowledge, general concern for all

children, childhood/adult avid readers, professional sharing, and the building of background knowledge.

In addition to the themes discovered, the study had several implications that lead to an understanding of African American elementary principals perceptions of reading curriculum and instruction: culturally relevant leadership, reading is more than just reading, sociocultural perception of reading, collaboration, professional development, and systematic knowledge of reading curriculum and instruction.

Preface

I would first like to give thanks to God, from whom all blessing flow. I would like to thank my mother, Martha Cathryn Devero Mitchell, who is my backbone, and truly the wind beneath my wings. Thank you for spoiling me, and letting me be your little girl a little while longer. You were probably more anxious for me to finish this dissertation than I. I love you with all my heart, mind, body, and soul. To my energetic son, Kourtland Rashad Mitchell, my unplanned gift from God. Mommy loves you with all her heart, and everyday is a new experience filled with joy and laughter. I just hope that you will value and appreciate acquiring an education as much, if not more than I do.

Words cannot express how grateful I am to my committee. Thank you for pushing me to be a better academically and personally. To my co-chairs, Jim King and Nancy Williams, thank you for your patience, concern, and support throughout this process. Thank you to Kathryn Laframboise and Steve Permuth for never giving up on me. To Mary Alice Barksdale, I thank you for your words of encouragement and your words of corrective criticism. Thank you for everything. To Paula Leftwich, you are not only a colleague, but you're my friend. We began this journey together, and we've survived. Thank you for all your support and kind words.

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faced many personal and professional hardships during this educational journey, but through faith, friendship, support, and determination we have accomplished the task we set for ourselves. You are truly my "soul mates" in education. I love you, I appreciate you, and I thank God for you.

Chapter I

Introduction

The basic foundation for learning is determined by the ability to read

effectively and efficiently. Teachers are primarily responsible for teaching

children how to read, with elementary teachers being the specific initiators of

formally structured reading experiences for children (Edwards, 1984; Hoffman,

2000; Nolen, 2001). As a professional group, elementary teachers provide the

foundation on which subsequent reading skills are built (Zipperer, Worley, &

Sisson, 2002). Although teachers are heavily relied upon to teach children how

to read, the role of the elementary school principal in the reading process has not

been examined in recent studies (Dandridge, Edwards, & Pleasants, 2000).

More specifically, the role of African American elementary principals and their

perceptions on reading has yet to be examined. Persistently, the voices of

African American teachers and administrators are silenced by the world of

academia that claims to be diverse and non-partisan (Delpit, 1995; Pollard,

1997), thus making it crucial to explore the phenomena of reading curriculum and

instruction from the perceptions and experiences of African American elementary

principals.

African Americans and Literacy

In efforts to comprehend the experiences and perceptions of African

American elementary principals in regards to reading curriculum and instruction,

it is relevant to discuss the historical significance of African Americans and

literacy.

African Americans have fought many hardships to gain access to literacy. Literacy was once non-existent among African Americans, but can now be called a right. The history of African Americans and literacy is a turbulent one with numerous causalities and injuries. Many individuals were lynched and shot during the struggle to gain access to a free and proper education (Dyson, 1993). Despite this painful history, the value of reading and writing ranks high among people of color.

The attainment of an education by African Americans during the times of slavery and segregation served as proof that people of color were not obtuse, but intelligent beings capable of achieving diplomas and college degrees (hooks, 1994). They were individuals capable of being colleagues of white professors, white principals and white teachers; most importantly, African Americans were not the educationally subservient humans they were thought to be in the past (Pollard, 1997).

Even though African Americans proved themselves more than able to attain an education, language barriers have often caused rifts. These language barriers have existed because African Americans have had linguistic experiences and perceptions that have differed from that of their peers and teachers. When schools became integrated, African American students lost their comfort level with teachers and administrators of their own race (Moore, 1982). As a direct result of integration, they were thrust into a world of white, middle class teachers with different beliefs and certainly different linguistic habits of their own. The teachers were not accustomed to the language and cultural heritage of their

African American students. Instead of embracing the differences, integrated education typically forced African American students to conform to the rules of their new setting (Delpit, 1995). This assembly of cultures led to many literacy problems for African American children because of the lack of inclusion of their home life with their school life. Elementary principals were also impacted by this historic change. Many African American principals lost their jobs or were placed in non-leadership positions due to integration, thus leading to a significant decline in educational leadership by African American principals on all levels (Foster, 1990; Franklin, 1990; Pollard, 1997).

Despite this loss of leadership among African American principals, the few that survived the reduction have maintained a level of dignity and efficiency while conducting their administrative duties. They have continued to have high expectations for all children and faculty members (Lomotey, 1989). African American principals have made an effort to instill the core values introduced to them throughout their educational history; the same core values that enabled them to establish and maintain their role and power as principal (Lomotey, 1989; Minor, Onuegbuzie, Withcher & James, 2002).

The Perception and Power of the Principal

Many believe a person's perceptions influence the manner in which he or she exerts his or her power (Campbell-Whatley & Comer, 2000). Hsieh and Shen (1998) discuss power from a political perspective which views leadership as bargaining, compromising, negotiation, and exerting influences on the basis of power. The beliefs, attitudes, and experiences individuals encounter often shape

the dynamics of their position in an organization, as well as, in their personal lives (Norte, 1999). The power of the principal comes in various forms that are enacted in a continuous relationship within the human experience (Norte, 1999). Principals have the power to coordinate, delegate and even manipulate situations and programs within their school and sometimes within the communities in which they serve.

The power of principals in today's classrooms transcends those of the past in some ways. They have a responsibility to their faculty, staff, students, and parents to provide quality leadership and incorporate an appropriate learning environment conductive to all students that attend their schools. They must ensure curricula are appropriate for all learners. The accountability age pressures many principals to motivate and provide remediation to many students in their schools who lack the tools essential to school success. "Technology, demographic shifts, redefinitions of "family," testing and accountability, decentralization and site-based management, violence, changes in the economy, new court mandates related to desegregation, various legislative initiatives such as school vouchers, and the press to privatize have created a web of conflicting demands and expectations for school principals" (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002, p. 1).

Principals must collaborate with their faculty and their district to ensure students are receiving the necessary skills to be successful on standardized reading tests. This collaboration includes ensuring principals and teachers receive appropriate professional development.

For the purposes of this paper, the power of the principal focuses on their role in selecting and implementing their school's reading curriculum as it relates to instruction.

<center>*Role of Principals and Reading Curriculum*</center>

Elementary school principals' job description includes ensuring formal reading programs are effective and appropriate for students (Fraatz, 1987; Zipperer, Worley, & Sisson, 2002). According to Bean (1995), the initiation of a school reading program is a necessary charge for principals. "It necessitates a deep knowledge and understanding of reading acquisition, reading research, and reading instruction. It also requires an ability to create an atmosphere for change, and thus an understanding of the dynamics and leadership and the change process" (Bean, 1995, p. 3). This understanding for change includes ensuring the reading curriculum meets the needs of the students. It is important for administrators to be flexible and understand the need for change that accommodates their students when using a reading curriculum. Principals must review various reading curriculum and attend many hours of district level in-service to be aware of the things that are available to meet the needs of the students.

Numerous reading programs and interventions are incorporated into elementary school curriculums. A reading program inventory by Just Read, Florida (2003) reported that over sixteen hundred reading programs are used statewide (www.justreadflorida.com). These programs are designed to increase

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reading achievement among developing readers, and their uses are sometimes based on a principal's decisions and knowledge.

In addition to utilizing reading programs, principals may foster reading achievement by encouraging students to read more throughout their day (Allington, 2001; Graves, Watts-Taffe, Graves, 1999; McCormick, 1995; Zipperer, Worley, & Sission, 2002). Some research shows students who read more and comprehend what they are reading tend to be better students over time (Gardiner, 2001; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Kamhi & Laing, 2001). Several researchers believe students who read more in their day tend to be stronger readers. (Allington, 2001; Hoffman & McCarthey; 2000b; Washington & Craig, 2001).

Realistic elementary principals understand students need to be motivated to be successful in academics in general, but especially in the area of reading. Principals may use various methods to spark the interest in reading, which perhaps may lead to life long readers who enjoy engaging with expository or narrative text (Bean, 1995). "Principals may, however, impact teaching and classroom practices through such school decisions as formulating school goals, setting and communicating high achievement expectations, organizing classrooms for instruction, allocating necessary resources, supervising teachers' performance, monitoring student progress, and promoting a positive, orderly environment for learning" (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990, p.95).

Principals may assume the more prepared their students are, the higher their test performance (Wohlstetter & Malloy, 2001; Zipperer, Worley, & Sisson,

2002). In some cases principals may initiate before and after school programs to assist lower level students and others requiring additional assistance in preparing for state mandated standardized tests. In other situations, the principal may incorporate other methods to assist in increasing student's performance. Some schools have literacy volunteers to provide extra attention to students in the area of reading (Klenk & Kibby, 2000).

School accountability makes it important for principals to collaborate with faculty members, parents, students, and sometimes the community. Collaboration gives individuals the opportunity to discuss effective methods of delivering instruction, prepare students for state mandated standardized tests, and assist students with academic achievement.

Collaboration

Collaboration is important for the development of successful school reading programs. Principals, teachers, parents, librarians, and students are all partners in the learning process. This partnership allows for positive communication and interaction to occur among the various participants in the learning community. Research shows that successful schools make an effort to actively involve all parties in the learning community (Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, & Ro, 2000). Their roles could be incorporated into the design, implementation, and evaluation of a program (Blasé & Blasé, 1999).

Engaging in professional development activities allows for collaboration to occur. Professional development enables educators to learn new information or

revisit existing knowledge and transfer it into strategies beneficial to students. Without collaboration and professional development, schools may suffer.

Professional Development

Elementary school administrators also play an integral part in the reading education process by hiring and promoting well-prepared elementary instructors (Lillibridge, 1979; Stiggins, 2001; Zipperer, Worley, & Sisson, 2002). With careful selection of their staff, principals should have confidence in the individuals they hire to effectively teach reading. However, if principals want successful reading programs, they must take more active roles in the development and promotion of their school's reading curriculum as well. According to Au (1995), an effective reading program can only be developed through an interactive process, informed by current theory and research on literacy instruction, that involves teachers, administrators, librarians, students, and parents.

Proper development of administrators and teachers is important in having a successful reading program that is beneficial to students (Fullan, 2002). Principals must be active in their reading programs if they wish for their students to be successful on state mandated standardized tests. Not only should they design reading programs for their schools, they must ensure all teachers, as well as themselves, receive the proper professional development to continuously support reading (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002; Fraatz, 1987; Lillibridge, 1979; Stiggins, 2001). Many teachers are not prepared to teach reading to students. Some college programs only require one course of reading development and problems (Kamhi and Laing, 2001) for pre-service elementary teachers, while

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other states like Florida, require as many as four courses. In addition, many principals receive little, if any, coursework in reading curriculum and instruction or professional development in the teaching of reading, but are held accountable for developing, implementing, and evaluating reading programs in their schools (Zipperer, Worley, & Sisson, 2002).

If students are to perform adequately on state mandated standardized tests, teachers must receive the necessary professional development and support, but administrators should allow teachers the opportunity to participate in the planning and implementation of professional development (Quinn, 2002; Tyler, 1983). The professional development must be meaningful and pertinent to the school's reading goals. "High-performance schools select professional development activities that directly address their students' needs and correspond with the particular reform agenda of the school" (Wohlstetter & Malloy, 2001, p. 56). This study intended to discover, through the principals' words, the specific means of support for faculty teaching reading.

Standardized Reading Tests

Principals are now held accountable for their school's students' performance on standardized tests (Rinehart, Short, Short, & Eckley, 1998). Therefore, it is certainly in a principal's best interests to understand reading pedagogy. Previously many teachers and parents were targets of much criticism in terms of student achievement in the classroom and on standardized tests. At this point, principals are also feeling the pressure, thus making them targets of criticism in the age of academic accountability (Dandridge, Edwards, &

Pleasants, 2000; Stiggins, 2001). This pressure of accountability has many

elementary principals searching for the best practices to ensure that their

students are prepared to attain high scores on the state mandated standardized

tests. Forty-nine states have mandated curriculums, and the emerging presence

of alternative education such as charter schools and home schooling serve to

provide new consequences of accountability not imagined fifteen years ago

(Pierce, 2000). With the current emphasis on standardized testing, it is essential

for both student success and school success that principals have Bean's (1995)

deep understanding of reading. As reading is a basic component of all high

stakes, state-mandated standardized tests, students in schools that emphasize

the importance and value of reading should perform better on these tests.

Therefore, principals must be even more active in developing reading programs.

In the context of the current study, high stakes testing (Zipperer, Worley, &

Sisson, 2002) consists of state mandated standardized tests. The tests are

usually taken in the fourth, eighth, and tenth grades, but with new legislation,

testing will be conducted in additional grades. In most cases, the mandated tests

are a requirement for graduation or promotion to the next grade (Dever & Barta,

2001; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001). The American

Educational Research Association's position statement (2000) discussed the

notion of achievement tests and how these tests affect schools and their

students.

Certain uses of achievement test results are termed "high stakes" if

they carry serious consequences for students or educators.

Schools may be judged according to the school-wide average

scores of their students. High school-wide scores may bring public

praise or financial rewards; low scores may bring public

embarrassment or heavy sanctions. For individual students, high

scores may bring a special diploma attesting to exceptional

academic accomplishment; or low scores may result in students

being held back in grade or denied a high school diploma (p. 1).

Before 1980, less than a dozen states in the United States required mandated

standardized testing for students, but in the new millennium, a majority of the

states (over 70%) use high-stakes testing as a means of assessing students

(Hoffman, Assaf & Paris, 2001).

State mandated standardized tests, such as the Florida Comprehensive

Assessment Test (FCAT) (www.firn.edu/doe/sas/fcat.htm), have changed the

way many administrators support their students and teachers. In 1998, the newly

elected Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, initiated the Florida A+ plan in public

schools. Some individuals view the program as "a harsh, standards-based

accountability measure that assigns grades from A to F to each elementary,

middle, and high school in the state of Florida. Students' scores on the FCAT

determine each school's grade" (George, 2001, p. 28). Others support the

program because they believe it holds schools, administrators and teachers

accountable for their students' learning. In addition, it allows parents and other

community individuals to view tangible evidence of a school's commitment to

teaching and preparing students for standardized tests. As a result of these state

mandated tests, principals are expected to increase achievement for their

students more than ever.

Problem

Research supports the importance of the "funds of knowledge" (Moll,

1994) with which young children enter formal education. African American

children bring with them different sets of funds of knowledge than European

American children whose funds of knowledge more typically match that of the

schools' teachers and administrators (Delpit, 1995, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Presently, there is minimal research documenting the perception of principals in

relation to reading curriculum and instruction. More specifically, in terms of

African American elementary principals, the research is basically insufficient.

African American principals have the unique perception of one who has grown-up

and has been educated in the midst of the European American dominated

system of education, thus investigating their perceptions of reading curriculum

and instruction is relevant to individuals in the world of academia and politics who

desire to gain insight on the phenomena of reading leadership through this

specific population of educators. By virtue of their leadership within an

educational system that is arguably European American centered, African

American principals can be seen as starting a chasm of difference. Therefore,

an interview study of these unique individuals was warranted.

Purpose of the Study

The push towards high-stakes testing makes reading an important issue at

all levels. Now more than ever, principals, teachers, reading specialists,

counselors, librarians, students, and parents must collaborate to make reading a successful and viable experience for children (Au, 1995; Bean, 1995; Edwards, 1984; Fraatz, 1987; Huges & Ubben, 1994; Quinn, 2002; Wohlstetter & Malloy, 2001; Zipperer, Worley, & Sisson, 2002). Since reading is the basic foundation for all learning, it encompasses all subject areas (Ediger, 2000; Pavonetti, Brimmer Cipielewski, 2003; Sanacore, 1977; Smitherman, 1998).

Culturally relevant teaching has been addressed by Ladson-Billings (1994, 2001), but culturally relevant educational leadership has not been examined in the context of elementary school principals, thus making it essential to discover African American elementary principals' perceptions of reading curriculum and instruction in their schools. Many times the voice of the principal as it pertains to reading curriculum and instruction is not heard (Dandridge, Edwards & Pleasants, 2000). Further, research on elementary school administration tends to focus on overall school effectiveness and not specifically upon effective reading education (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Brookover, 1985; Dantley, 1990; Fortenberry, 1985; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Lezotte & Bancroft, 1985; Uline, Miller, Tschannen-Moran, 1998). The information gathered in this study may enable principals and others interested in literary leadership to learn more about the perceptions of African American elementary principals as it pertains to reading curriculum and instruction.

Significance of Study

Since reading is an important issue in American society, and it has its beginnings in the elementary schools, the perceptions and experiences of

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elementary school principals was examined. Researchers must understand the African American school leaders' perceptions and experiences in efforts to fully comprehend reading curriculum and instruction in their schools. It is these perceptions that may establish and aid in the development of successful reading programs that produce life long learners and readers who value and respect reading and its importance in our society.

Research Questions

The questions I attempted to answer through a collective case study leading to grounded theory are:

- What are the perceived relationships among African American elementary principals, their perceived linguistic experiences, and their perceptions of school literacy?

- What are perceived experiences of African American principals regarding reading instruction in the elementary schools?

- Based on experience as a teacher and an administrator, how do African American principals perceive reading to be addressed in their schools?

- How does prior experience with reading influence African American principals' perceptions of their leadership of reading instruction in their schools?

- What principal-initiated methods or approaches are used to assist students with reading achievement on standardized tests?

Definition of Terms

- Accelerated Reader (AR) is tracking system used to aid students in becoming more efficient readers by testing their knowledge of books they have read. Students complete a quiz by computer based on the book and receive a numerical score. "Accelerated Reader's philosophy is that by using the system, students are motivated to read more and better books" (Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipielewski, 2003, p. 300).

- Administrator, for the purposes of this study, and principal maybe used interchangeably. The term refers to the person who leads a school.

- Basal series is a reading program composed of a "graded series of student texts, workbooks, skill sheets, unit tests, teacher manuals, and supplemental material (Christie, Enz & Vuklich, 1997, p. 174)

- Ebonics/Black English/African American English is defined as "dialects usually (but not exclusively) spoken by low socio-economic level blacks among themselves, and characterized by the presence of a significant proportion of particular phonological and syntactic features different from standard English" (Cullinan & Kocher, 1974, p. 197).

- Florida A+ Plan for Education is designed to improve schools and provide for accountability through a system of monetary awards for both low and high performing schools. In addition, the plan addresses issues of school safety, social promotion and teacher certification (Rosenthal, 2002).

- Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is the test given to students in grades 3 through 10. The test is composed of a criterion and

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norm referenced section. FCAT tests students in reading, writing and

mathematics. In 2003, students were also tested on science for the first

time (Rosenthal, 2002). "The primary purpose of the FCAT is to assess

student achievement of the higher-order cognitive skills represented in the

Sunshine State Standards (SSS) in Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and

Science. A second purpose is to compare Florida students to the

Reading and Mathematics performance of students across the nation

using a norm referenced test (NRT)" (www.firn.edu/doe/sas/fcat:htm)

- No Child Left Behind (2001) was established to narrow the achievement

  gap. "This program was created to demonstrate how local initiatives can

  help meet a state's definition of adequate yearly progress and attain

  specific measurable goals for improving student achievement and

  narrowing achievement gaps" (www.ed.gov).

- Professional development is the opportunity for teachers and

  administrators to further expand their knowledge in areas related to

  curriculum and pedagogy (www.fldoe.org/teacher/resource).

- Reading curriculum is the plan a school has enacted in order to guide the

  learning of students in the content area of reading (Bean, 1995).

- Reading First is a nationwide effort to develop proficient readers. The

  initiative is based on scientific research. "The program is designed to

  select, implement, and provide professional development for teachers

  using scientifically based reading programs, and to ensure accountability

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through ongoing, valid and reliable screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based assessment" (http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst).

- Star Reading is a reading assessment computer program used to determine a student's reading level (www.renlearn.com).

- Sunshine State Standards (SSS) are the curriculum standards for the state of Florida (www.firn.edu/doe.htm).

- Title I is "designed to support state and local school reform efforts tied to challenging state academic standards in order to reinforce and amplify efforts to improve teaching and learning for students farthest from meeting state standards. Individual public schools with poverty rates above 40 percent may use Title I funds, along with other federal, state, and local funds, to operate school-wide programs to upgrade the instructional program for the whole school" (www.ed.gov/programs/titleipara). The goals of the program are to provide additional instruction to children who qualify; provide additional funding to schools and districts that serve a high population of low-income families; train educators to know the needs of the special population of students; and improve the academic achievement of eligible participants in comparison to their peers (www.edweek.org/context/topics).

Organization of the Study

Chapter one was an introduction to the topic of elementary principals and reading in their schools. The chapter also introduces the elements that may affect reading programs in schools. The problem and purpose of the study was

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discussed along with the specific questions to be addressed. In addition, definitions of terms relevant to the study were provided.

Chapter two focused on the review of literature related to reading. The literature included, African Americans and literacy, the perception and power of the principal, the role of the African American elementary principals in reading instruction and how African American elementary principals view standardized testing.

Chapter three discussed collective case studies leading to grounded theory. The qualitative study used interviews and field notes to access information from African American elementary principals to discover their perceptions of their knowledge, desires, and concerns in relation to their schools' specified reading programs. This study intended to bring to light African American elementary principals' perceptions of their practices and beliefs in the area of reading instruction through collective case studies (Stake, 2000) leading to grounded theory (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002). Collective case studies allowed the experiences and the perceptions of African American elementary principals to be introduced and explored as a series of separate, but collective cases, that lead to a comparing and contrasting of the cases and ultimately developed into grounded theory.

Chapter four introduced the results from the interviews with the principals. The chapter began with an introduction, a brief discussion of each principal, a discussion of the principals as a cohort, answering of the research questions, and a conclusion of the chapter.

Chapter five provided a discussion of the major issues that emerged as a result of the study. The specific areas discussed are reading is more than just reading, socio-cultural perception of reading, collaboration, professional development, systematic knowledge of reading, limitations, the significance of the study within today's educational settings, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

Exploring the principals' perceptions about reading is crucial to students' success. Leadership and reading development should coincide with one another if students are to achieve the necessary reading foundation.

As the chosen leaders of schools, principals make the major decisions that may influence and determine student achievement (Ediger, 1998). Principals have various roles including, organizers and delegaters of authority and the responsibility to maintain overall school cohesion and effectiveness (Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995). Since principals make major decisions in these areas, it is vital for their perceptions to be explored as they relate to reading curriculum and instruction.

This chapter evaluated and discussed research relevant to the study. The chapter discussed African Americans and literacy; the perception and power of the principal; the role of African American elementary principals in reading instruction, and principals' perceptions of standardized testing.

African Americans and Literacy

The relevance of studying African American elementary principals and their relation to reading education will be examined through the history of education for African Americans and the language barriers between African Americans and their teachers.

The number of African American teachers has declined throughout the United States, and as the majority of principals are recruited from the teaching faculty, there is an increasing decline in African American principals (Cole, 1986; Irvine, 1988). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2003), approximately 7 percent of African Americans received bachelor's degrees in the field of education, while 34 percent of African Americans received master's degrees in education. Many question the reduction in a profession that once was highly respected in the African American community (Edwards & Polite, 1992). According to Irvine (1988), many African Americans are choosing more prestigious professions to assist them in becoming financially stable. As a result, many African Americans who once majored in education prior to desegregation are now opting for other professional options that are available (Hunter-Boykins, 1992).

Principals arguably have certain attributes not found in all educators, such as leadership skills, multi-task orientation, and the ambition to accept additional responsibilities. African American principals may have an additional set of qualities that may or may not be found in white principals. Lomotey (1994) identifies three qualities of African American principals: a) "commitment to education of all students, b) confidence in the ability of all students to do well, and c) compassion for, and understanding of all students and the communities in which they live" (p. 204). Due to of the large number of African American children in today's schools, there exists an expanding need for African American principals (Zacher, 2002). Black students need Black role models other than

professional athletes and entertainers for the development of self-esteem and identity (Cole, 1986). African American children need to see individuals that mirror them and are seen as successful to help them gain an appreciation for their heritage (Yee & Fruth, 1973). This mirror image may provide the necessary motivation for African American children to achieve success. In addition, it is important for all children to be exposed to successful African Americans.

History of Education for African Americans

African Americans and literacy were once considered non-compatible in America. In the early centuries of American history, African Americans were forbidden to read, write, or be educated in general (Carruthers, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This prohibition occurred because knowledge was, and still is, perceived as power (Giovanni, 1994). During this period, slave owners knew if African Americans gained the necessary power of an education, they would become a threat- a threat to their white culture, a threat to their perceived domination, and a threat to the life they were accustomed to living (Edwards & Polite, 1992).

For years, African Americans have struggled for the right of equal education. "The chronicle of the civil rights movement in the United States illustrates the centrality of education to the fight of African Americans for equal opportunity and full citizenship" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. ix). African Americans endured lynching, bombings, boycotts, sit-ins, and other sacrifices. Many Americans, not just African Americans, sacrificed their lives for the sake of the struggle for educational equality.

In spite of the struggle, many African Americans succeeded in attaining an education. They fought against the racist and political ploys initiated by those trying to prevent African Americans from bettering themselves.

But if there has been one overwhelming effort made by Blacks

since the beginning of our American sojourn, it has been the belief

in the need to obtain education. The laws that were made against

our reading, voting, holding certain jobs, living in certain areas,

were made not because we were incapable; you don't have to

legislate against incapability. No one tells an infant, "You can't

walk"; one tells that to a toddler. No one tells a six year old, "You

can't drive," one tells that to a fifteen-year-old. No one tells a man

or woman, "You can't read," unless there is the knowledge that if

that person becomes educated, he or she will no longer be my

slave; will no longer sharecrop my land, will no longer tolerate

injustice (Giovanni, 1994, p. 92-93).

Their success served as proof that African Americans were intelligent beings not to be considered educationally submissive to whites (Butchart, 1994; Carruthers, 1994; hooks, 1994). African Americans became teachers and principals in efforts to expand the knowledge base and social progress (Butchart, 1994) of African Americans. During the years of segregation, educators were valued in the African American communities because they were considered the intellectual individuals (Edwards, 1999; Hooks, 1995; McCullough-Garrett, 1993). These individuals usually attended historically Black colleges and universities because

they were not welcomed or were refused admission to white institutions of learning (Hunter-Boykins, 1992).

Once schools were integrated, many African American children were lost in the transition (McCullough-Garrett, 1993). This transition included new curriculum, new teachers, and new peers. Gone were the teachers who made them feel secure and assisted them in achieving academic goals (Moore, 1982). Gone were the unique pedagogies, caring natures, and conversations of the African American teacher (McCulough-Garrett, 1993). They were replaced with white teachers, many whom were not accustomed to instructing children of color (Johnson, 1970). Gone were the peers who looked and spoke in the same manner, replaced by the various hues of skin making a transition similar to that of the African American student.

The integration of schools caused various problems for the African American student. Among these difficulties were unfamiliar language barriers, which were challenged and criticized, and their dialects and reading skills causing many to suffer academically (Johnson, 1970).

African American Language Barriers

One issue with African Americans and literacy concerns the perceived and actual language barriers. African American children and adults often speak with a common dialect viewed as a form of slang (Delpit, 1998). During the early 1970s, Dr. Robert L. Williams introduced the term Ebonics, derived from the words ebony, meaning black, and phonics, which refers to sound (Haute & Perez, 2000; Hoover, 1998; Seymour, Abdulkarim, & Johnson, 1999; Smith,

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1998). Ebonics is also known as African American English or Black English

(Bragdon, 1974; Cullinan, 1974; Jaggar, 1974; Smith, 1998; Smitherman, 1983).

Ebonics is perceived as a lesser form of English even though it has standard

rules of grammar and is based on African language and culture.

"Ebonics/African American Language has a number of other characteristics,

including semantics, intonation, favored genres, sociolinguistic rules, speaking

style, learning and teaching style, and world view/themes" (Hoover, 1998, p. 72).

In 1996, Oakland School Board of Education rendered the decision to

recognize the language many African Americans brought to school. The

recognition included an instructional plan that would enable African American

students to learn Standard American English without compromising the language

spoken in their home environment (Haute & Perez, 2000; Hoover, 1998). "The

board further maintained that Ebonics, the home/community language of African

American children, should not be stigmatized, and that this language should be

affirmed, maintained, and used to help African American children acquire fluency

in the standard code" (Perry, 1998, p. 3).

Students with language differences need to feel comfortable in their

educational environment because language is seen as a means of transmitting

cultural values. They should never feel ostracized because they can't speak

standard American English. Many African American children speak the language

that is spoken at home (Johnson, 1970; Sulentic, 2001). Teachers are quick to

dismiss Ebonics as a form of language because of their middle class values

when there exists evidence that explains social, linguistic, and cultural factors

that have shaped and maintained Ebonics as a legitimate and viable dialect of English (Aaron & Powell, 1982; Dean & Fowler, 1974; Nembhard, 1983; Seymour, Abdulkarim, & Johnson, 1999). Instead of embracing the Ebonics and using it as a path to teaching African American students standard American English literacy, teachers are often quick to correct students or label them as special education students (Cullinan, 1974; Dean & Fowler, 1974; Haute & Perez, 2000; Sulentic, 2001). "A huge mismatch can and often does occur when educators lack the knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of their students' language and culture, especially when it differs from their own" (Sulentic, 2001, p. 24). According to Gordon and Thomas (1990), unless students can access their own cultural currencies as vehicles for learning, and thereby inform their mental functions by the contexts in which they live, learning may become difficult. In addition, they must be allowed to use interactions and strategies relevant and established within their own cultures or they can and will suffer academically (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Teachers often lack understanding of their African American students' language and its origins (Jaggar, 1974; Perry, 1998). Teacher education programs usually do not expose pre-service teachers to language diversity courses or courses that assist in understanding the structures and content of African American English (Cullinan, 1974; Sulentic, 2001). For teachers to be accepting of the language, they must become competent in its foundation and structure (Hoover, 1998). Thus African American teachers and principals who are sensitive to Ebonics can serve as a crucial link to literacy attainment.

Despite the support for Ebonics, it is important for African American children to learn Standard American English, but their home environment and cultural heritage should not be ignored (Dean & Fowler, 1974; Delpit, 1998; Seymour, Abdulkarim, & Johnson, 1999). "If we are going to celebrate diversity in our classrooms, we must learn to be respectful not just of various literatures, but of the various knowledges, rooted in various languages, that our students bring with them into the classroom" (Jonsberg, 2001, p. 51). The use of a child's home language and cultural environment should be used in connection with educational objectives (Boykins, 1984; Dean & Fowler, 1974; Goodman, 1965). When children see their home environment in connection with their school environment, they gain confidence in their educational abilities. Once this confidence is gained, they are able to acquire additional skills like standard American English that are necessary to be successful in life (Haute & Perez, 2000; Jaggar, 1974; Seymour, Abdulkarim, & Johnson, 1999).

Codeswitching

In the context of literacy, African American principals are compelled to be overly cautious in terms of communicating verbally and in writing. The historical precedent of African Americans and literacy makes African Americans, in general, self-conscious and timid in certain educational and professional environments leading many African Americans to codeswitch. Codeswitching is defined as using two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction (Flowers, 2000). "Codeswitching can serve a variety of social functions. Power and solidarity are major uses for alternating linguistic variants.

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Which language implies authority, however, depends on the special circumstances of the situation and on the identities of the participants" (Flowers, 2000, p. 223). Codeswitching allows individuals to move beyond the perceived and actual language barriers that prohibit many African Americans from succeeding in certain fields by acknowledging the importance of standard American English and home language.

Throughout their educational lives, African American principals and African Americans in general, have been scrutinized if they did not properly utilize standard American English, thus their views on literacy are particularly interesting and in the area of literacy instruction, informative. Researching African American elementary principals' perceptions and experiences will introduce new paths not actively explored. The insight given by this group of individuals may add depth to issues relating to reading curriculum and instruction, and how they perceive and exhibit power in their schools.

The Perception and Power of the Principal

Many believe a person's perceptions influence the manner in which power is exerted. Yukl (1989) viewed power as the influence a leader may or may not have over the attitudes and behavior of their subordinates. Hsieh and Shen (1998) discussed power from a political perspective that views leadership as bargaining, compromising, negotiation, and exerting influences on the basis of power. Bierstedt (Shapiro, 2000) focused on power from a social standpoint in which the school should be considered a social institution with varying roles and positions. Principals hold a unique position that often requires them to perform

different roles. While performing these roles, principals should maintain the

power and authority of their organization, but they must exert their power

carefully to be successful and effective leaders (Shapiro, 2000).

The beliefs, attitudes, and experiences individuals encounter often shape

the dynamics of their position in an organization, as well as, in their personal

lives (Norte, 1999). The power of the principal comes in various forms, and is a

continuous relationship in the human experience (Norte, 1999). Principals have

the power and responsibility to coordinate, legislate, collaborate, delegate and

even manipulate situations and programs within their school, and sometimes

within the communities in which they serve (Brunner, 2000).

The power of principals in today's classrooms transcends those of the

past in some ways. According to Drake and Roe (1999), "the old patterns of

principal behavior will not be sufficient to meet the new opportunities for

leadership. No longer can the principal spend time on efficiently organized

administration to indicate that his or her role is being competently fulfilled" (p.

113). They have a responsibility to their faculty, staff, students, and parents to

provide quality leadership and incorporate an appropriate learning environment

conductive to all students that attend their schools. They must ensure curricula

are appropriate for all learners. The accountability age pressures many

principals to motivate and provide remediation for many students in their schools

because they lack the tools essential to school success. Principals must

collaborate with their faculty and their district to ensure students are receiving the

necessary skills to be successful on standardized reading tests. This

collaboration includes ensuring principals and teachers receive appropriate professional development. "The principal of today and of the future must increasingly be willing to prepare for wise, critical participation in a society characterized by conflict, chronic change, and increasing interdependency. New technologies to obtain, analyze, and communicate information are arising daily" (Drake & Roe, 1999, p.114).

Role of African American Elementary Principals in Reading Instruction

Elementary principals play a crucial role in developing reading programs in their schools. Kletzein (1996) conducted a study of reading programs in nationally recognized elementary schools. The researcher found that principals in these schools incorporated numerous literacy activities with the support of the assistant principals, reading specialists, teachers, librarians, staff, students and parents. The principals in the schools played an active role in their schools' reading curriculum and instruction programs. "Principals of most of the schools play an active role in encouraging reading. Some principals go into classrooms and talk with children about their reading; some invite the students to their offices; some sit with them in the cafeteria or on the playground; but all of them participate in listening to children read and in talking to them about reading" (Kletzien, 1996, p. 268-269).

Collaboration Between Administrators and Teachers

For the purposes of this study, collaboration was defined as the social discourse among teachers and administrators in a learning community that enables them to see multiple perspectives and communicate effectively and

efficiently (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Many researchers stress the importance of principals and teachers collaborating to make reading a practical experience for all students. This collaboration implies there should be a means of communication between the principal and the teacher (Afflerbach, 2000; Wohlstetter & Malloy, 2001). Lomotey (1994) discusses that leaders in organizations develop and initiate relevant and coherent goals that will cause the least amount of confusion and conflict among individuals in the school setting. They incorporate these goals in an effort to develop positive interaction between principals and teachers that will lead to higher student achievement. "If the principals facilitate and embody clear goals, the likelihood is greater that other members of the organization will internalize these goals, thereby increasing the probability of greater organizational harmony" (Lomotey, 1994, p. 205-206).

Classroom teachers and principals are important in the selection of the reading curriculum, but media specialists, support staff, parents, and the students themselves should not be excluded from the reading curriculum design and decision making process. Blasé and Blasé (1999) stated that successful schools are those that make an effort to involve others in the design, implementation, and evaluation of teaching.   The study suggested that principals who are effective constructors of knowledge and are positive instructional leaders incorporate meaningful opportunities for professional collaboration through reflective discussions, peer coaching, study groups, and observations. While Sulzer, Wolfson, and Rabenburg (2002) state that the best way to accommodate and activate a positive literacy environment is for schools to act as a team and make

school-wide literacy attainment a reality. Heck, Larsen, and Marcoulides (1990) discovered that principals in high achieving schools collaborate with others in their school. "Teachers and administrators should work together toward common beliefs about how students learn to read and what types of instructional techniques are most effective in promoting reading achievement" (Wohlstetter & Malloy, 2001, p. 54).

Pounder, Ogawa and Adams (1995) conducted a quantitative study to discover the relationship between organizational leadership, effective organizations, and school effectiveness. The data source consisted of surveys from elementary and high school employees. A random stratified sampling was employed to conduct the study. One finding of the study was that leadership varies from school to school. In addition, the researchers discovered that leadership is associated with performance and the efforts initiated by public schools to implement shared decision- making might improve the teacher performance and student achievement performance.

Professional Development of Teachers and Administrators in Reading Instruction

Teachers and administrators should receive professional development in reading instruction to assist all students in becoming competent and successful readers (Afflerbach, 2000; Wohlstetter & Malloy, 2001). Teachers and administrators who receive the opportunity to participate in professional development tend to improve their teaching practice and reading curriculum design (Afflerbach, 2000).   "Staff development, in order to be successful, must focus on both principals and teachers, as their performance affects all other

aspects of effective schooling" (Fortenberry, 1985, p. 433). Teachers and

administrators need to remain aware of current research based learning

strategies and methods (Allington, 2001; Lezotte & Bancroft, 1985). This

incorporation of professional development can occur in multiple opportunities: in-

service programs, enrollment in graduate level courses, active attendance at

national, state, and local conferences, and review of professional journals and

educational articles relevant to the field of reading curriculum and instruction

(Ediger, 2000; Misulis, 2001).

The continuous professional development received by teachers and

administrators will assist them in delivering more effective instruction to students

while allowing them to be the recipients of new knowledge (Barth,1986;

Fortenberry, 1985). Campbell (2002) completed a study with teachers in grades

K through 6 and reported that teachers view professional development as an

important component in literacy and reading education. The teachers supported

professional development as long as it is meaningful and has opportunity to

observe, collaborate and brainstorm with other teachers to provide the support

(Quinn, 2002).

Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002) conducted a

longitudinal study with results parallel to Campbell's (2002) that suggested

teachers would alter their teaching methods to students providing they received

quality professional development opportunities that are relevant and reasonable

to implement. Stallings (1989) reported that there are positive and significant

differences in the reading achievement scores of students whose teachers

participated in professional development activities, due to teachers receiving the opportunity to become reflective, collaborative, and knowledgeable in reading curriculum and instruction.

The Jackson Staff Development plan is an example of professional development activities that have a positive effect on principals, teachers, and student achievement on standardized tests (Fortenberry, 1985). Students in this predominately Black school district increased their scores on the California Achievement Test (CAT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Teachers in this school district were the recipients of systematic, structured, ongoing training programs, which focused on outcome-based-instruction delivery and emphasized the following components: a) accommodating the variability in student aptitude and achievement, b) increase in instructional delivery time which took into account students varied learning styles, c) enabling teachers to focus on students in small and large group settings, d) enabling teachers to deal with outside distractions inherent in many individualized and learner responsive instructional systems, and e) enabling teachers to maximize student benefits from curriculum units carefully sequenced according to a hierarchy of skills and concepts and diagnostic evaluations based directly on those skills and concepts (Fortenberry, 1985).

The importance of remaining aware of cutting edge research cannot be overstated. Educators, whether teachers or administrators, must remain knowledgeable about current strategies, trends, and issues relating to education curriculum and instruction. Administrators and teachers who remain aware of

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research based reading instruction, not only gain valuable personal knowledge, but they gain knowledge that can and should be transferred to students to better educate and develop strong, successful readers.

African American Elementary Principals' Views of Standardized Reading Tests

Principals may view testing in different ways. Some may view testing as a way to chart student success and to hold teachers accountable for student learning, while others may view testing as a negative factor in schools today or as "big brother is watching" syndrome (Leithwood, Steinbach, & Jantzi, 2002). Whatever the view, principals are now held accountable for their students' learning and for ensuring they are prepared to successfully take specified standardized tests.

One way principals can assist students in achievement is to encourage students to read. McClanahan (2001) conducted a study on the high school level with tenth graders that concluded if students are to be successful at standardized tests, they must incorporate additional independent reading time in class and at home that is both effective and purposeful (Hoffman & McCarthey, 2000). A weakness in this study is that the researcher only surveyed tenth graders from the English II College Prep and English II Honors classes, a population that doesn't have trouble achieving high reading scores on standardized reading tests. Nonetheless, the study is relevant because it addresses the issue of increasing reading achievement on standardized tests, which is important to principals on all levels.

Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis (1996) discovered through their study that principals have no direct effect on student achievement in reading, but the study did find that female principals are perceived to have more of an effect on student achievement in comparison to male counterparts. The researchers discovered principals have more of an effect on the teachers who deliver the instruction to the students, thus leading indirectly to student achievement. An ethnographic study of nine first grade teachers conducted by Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston (1998) supported the conclusion that principals and teachers influence student achievement.

West (1985) conducted a quantitative study that concluded principals do indeed have an effect upon student achievement. "Reading achievement was higher in those schools in which the teachers perceived that the principals had high expectations for the students and math achievement was higher in those schools in which the principal provided instructional support for the staff" (West, 1985, p. 460). Students take cues from individuals in positions of authority. If the principal held the students accountable for their achievement and provided the necessary tools to perform effectively, then students tended to strive for educational success.

Goodard, Sweetland, and Hoy's (2000) findings supported the conclusions of West. The purpose of their study was to discover if there was a relationship between school effectiveness enhanced by a high academic emphasis and achievement scores. The quantitative study used surveys as a data source to gain information from teachers and students. The results indicated that if

individuals in authoritative positions (i.e., teachers and administrators) set clear, attainable goals and expectations, students would work hard to be successful. In addition, schools with a stronger academic emphasis, the higher the students' achievement scores.

Students who were highly involved in literacy learning through various reading and writing opportunities initiated by their teacher increased their achievement scores (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). In addition, the teachers used scaffolding to further support students' learning environment.

Edwards (1984) conducted a quantitative study to explore the relationship between perceived leadership behaviors and demographic characteristics of principals and the reading achievement levels of students in elementary schools. The study had two categories of principals. Category one explored principals of schools with more effective reading programs, while category two explored principals with less effective reading programs. The study concluded that a relationship existed between the principal's leadership behavior in relation to the school's reading program and reading achievement level of its students. The study also found that schools with more effective reading programs and higher achievement had principals who were more visible, supportive, receptive, and active in the school's reading program. They went above and beyond to make student's learning a viable experience. They utilized parents, other community members and resources to assist in students' academic success. In addition, the principals in more effective schools appeared to be reflective and considered

themselves to be responsible for student achievement. The primary purpose of the quantitative study was to link school effectiveness, principal leadership, and student reading achievement.

This section discussed the various views of elementary principals surrounding standardized reading tests, more specifically, the accountability pressure principals encounter and the push for high student achievement. The design was well intended, but due to the dearth of research focusing on African American elementary principals, the section discussed standardized reading tests and achievement in a generalized fashion.

Summary of Chapter

The purpose of this literature review was to introduce various issues related to African Americans and the role of the principal. The chapter began with an introduction followed by a discussion of the African Americans and literacy. This section attempted to introduce the obstacles African Americans encountered in the context of literacy as it has occurred throughout history to present time. Also included were the various language barriers some African Americans may or may not have encountered while in their school settings, and codeswitching.

The perception and power of the principal allowed the researcher to discuss the relevancy of power and perception and how it related to the role of the principal in the elementary school. More specifically, how the perception and power affected the decision-making of the principal.

The role of the African American elementary principal in reading instruction allowed for literature to be introduced and discussed in the areas of collaboration between administrators and teachers; professional development of teachers and administrators in reading instruction; and African American elementary principals' views of standardized reading tests.

The weaknesses of majority of the aforementioned research in the context of this study was that the above research generalized all principals. The current study focused upon the views and experiences, which may or may not have been unique to the African American elementary principal. This qualitative study examined African American elementary principals through a collective case study framework that lead to grounded theory. Chapter three focused on the methodology for the study.

Chapter III

Methods

Introduction

Understanding the actions and views of African American principals and their impact on the educational context is significant because the experiences of principals can shape the social, educational, and professional context of the reading curriculum and instruction within a school. The qualitative study used interviews and field notes to access information from African American elementary principals to discover their perceptions, knowledge, desires and concerns in relation to their schools' specified reading programs. This study intends to bring to light African American elementary principals' practices and beliefs in the area of reading instruction through collective case studies (Stake, 2000) leading to grounded theory (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002). Collective case studies allowed the experiences and the perceptions of African American elementary principals to be introduced and explored as a series of separate, but collective cases, that led to a comparing and contrasting of the cases and ultimately developed into grounded theory.

Problem

Research supports the importance of the "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1994) with which young children enter formal education. African American children bring with them different sets of funds of knowledge than European American children whose funds of knowledge more typically match that of the schools' teachers and administrators (Delpit, 1995, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

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Presently, there is minimal research documenting the perception of principals in relation to reading curriculum and instruction. More specifically, in terms of African American elementary principals, the research is basically insufficient. African American principals have the unique perception of one who has grown-up and has been educated in the midst of the European American dominated system of education, thus investigating their perceptions of reading curriculum and instruction relevant to individuals in the world of academia and politics who desire to gain insight into the phenomena of reading leadership through this specific population of educators. By virtue of their leadership within an educational system that is arguably European American centered, African American principals can be seen as starting a chasm of difference. Therefore, an interview study of these unique individuals was warranted.

Purpose of the Study

The push towards high-stakes testing makes reading an important issue at all levels. Now more than ever, principals, teachers, reading specialists, counselors, librarians, students, and parents must collaborate to make reading a successful and viable experience for children (Au, 1995; Bean, 1995; Edwards, 1984; Huges & Ubben, 1994; Quinn, 2002; Wohlstetter & Malloy, 2001; Zipperer, Worley, & Sisson, 2002). Since reading is the basic foundation for all learning, it encompasses all subject areas (Ediger, 2000; Pavonetti, Brimmer Cipielewski, 2003; Sanacore, 1977; Smitherman, 1998).

Culturally relevant teaching has been addressed by Ladson-Billings (1994, 2001), but culturally relevant educational leadership has not been examined in

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the context of elementary school principals, thus making it essential to study African American elementary principals and their perceptions of reading curriculum and instruction in their schools. Many times the voice of the principal as it pertains to reading curriculum and instruction is not heard (Dandridge, Edwards & Pleasants, 2000). Further, research on elementary school administration tends to focus on overall school effectiveness and not specifically upon effective reading education (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Brookover, 1985; Dantley, 1990; Fortenberry, 1985; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Lezotte & Bancroft, 1985; Uline, Miller, Tschannen-Moran, 1998). The information gathered in this study may enable principals and others interested in literary leadership to learn more about the perceptions of African American elementary principals.

Original Research Questions

- What are the perceived relationships among African American elementary principals, their perceived linguistic experiences, and their perceptions of school literacy?

- What are perceived experiences of African American principals regarding reading instruction in the elementary schools?

- Based on experience as a teacher and an administrator, how do African American principals perceive reading to be addressed in their schools?

- How does prior experience with reading influence African American principals' perceptions of their leadership of reading instruction in their schools?

- What principal-initiated methods or approaches are used to assist

  students with reading achievement on standardized tests?

<center>Revised Research Questions</center>

Based on my findings, the study's original research questions were

revised. The data that support that revision are included in Chapter Four. The

revised research questions follow:

- What are the perceived experiences of African American principals

  regarding reading instruction in the elementary schools?

- How does prior experience with reading, both personally and as a

  teacher/administrator, influence African American principals' perceived

  leadership of reading instruction in their schools?

- What principal initiated methods or approaches are used to assist

  students with reading achievement on standardized tests?

<center>*Design*</center>

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research was the method of choice for this study. Qualitative

research occurs in a natural setting (Hatch 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Qualitative researchers intend to discover the experiences of individuals in

settings familiar and unfamiliar to them. A true qualitative researcher strives to

make sense of individuals' everyday lives (Hatch, 2002). "Qualitative research is

an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting, descriptive

data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding

the subjects' point of view" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 261). The study

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examined the views of African American elementary principals as they converse

with the researcher about teaching reading, the promotion of reading, reading

interventions, reading achievement, professional development and its effects on

their schools. Their words, deeds, and motives cannot be properly established

through a quantitative study, but must be brought to the forefront through

qualitative methods that focus on their experiences and perceptions.

Collective Case Studies

A case study is defined as the study of specific phenomena, which may be

simple or complex (Mitchell, 1983; Patton, 2002; Stake, 2000). A collective case

study involves studying several cases at once. Stake (2000) defined collective

case study as "jointly studying a number of cases in order to investigate a

phenomena, population, or general condition" (p. 437).

The study focused on the population of African American elementary

principals in a central Florida county. Studying this population lead to an

understanding of African American elementary principals' perceptions of the

phenomena of reading, and how the phenomena related to their personal and

professional experiences.

Grounded Theory

The study was qualitatively designed using grounded theory for the

purposes of exploring the perceptions of African American elementary principals

about reading curriculum and instruction in their schools. The collective case

study design allowed the researcher to understand the meaning of events and

interactions within the participants' environment (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The

structure of the study allowed elementary principals the opportunity to voice

comfortably the nature and rationale for their schools' reading programs.

Grounded theory is a general methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Many researchers use it in efforts to develop fully and to explain the phenomena

they choose to study. Grounded theory focuses on the process of generating

theory (Patton, 2002). "It emphasizes steps and procedures for connecting

induction and deduction through the constant comparative method, comparing

research sites, doing theoretical sampling and testing emergent concepts with

additional fieldwork" (Patton, 2002, p. 125).

A constant comparative method of analysis was employed to review

themes continuously as they emerged from the data sources (Hatch, 2002). This

constant comparative method (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000) allowed the

researcher to employ inductive thinking and it can be employed from the

conception of data collection. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), inductive

thinking occurs when researchers go from the specific to the general. This

inductive reasoning allowed the analysis to emerge during data collection, which

for the purposes of this study can be viewed as grounded theory.

Grounded theory begins with general concepts and develops into more

detailed concepts. Specifically, the concepts are formulated, analytically

developed and the conceptual relationships are posited (Strauss & Corbin,

1994). The conceptually formed relationships include multiple perceptions from

the study's participants, which are grounded directly and indirectly in the

phenomena being studied. Grounded theory allowed a connection to develop

among the various perspectives through patterns and processes of action/interaction that in turn are associated carefully with specified conditions and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

The study was designed to discover the African American elementary principals' perceptions of their experiences, and actions as they related to the field of reading. A collective case study enabled the researcher to capture how African American elementary principals perceived reading, described reading, felt about reading, judged reading, remembered reading, made sense of, and talked about reading with others (Patton, 2002). Studying African American elementary principals through the theoretical scope of grounded theory intended to give the researcher a clarified understanding of the phenomena of reading from a series of perceptions that are often overlooked and misjudged.

Researcher

As a researcher I attempted to conduct the study with limited bias, but due to human nature, preconceived notions were in place. As a teacher by profession, I've always viewed the principal as an organizer who delegated authority to subordinates (Dandridge, Edwards, & Pleasants, 2000). By admitting to the potential for bias, I entered the study with a better ability to avoid it.

One reason for the study was to help me look beyond my preconceived notions and focus on the perceptions of African American elementary school administrators in regard to their perceptions of their personal and professional reading experiences. In my experience, many teachers feel administrators are insensitive to the needs of their faculty and students because they often exclude

faculty and staff in the decision making process or they fail to communicate effectively with teachers. This study attempted to allow the voices and opinions of principals to be expressed openly and honestly by ensuring anonymity and remaining non-judgmental.

Reliability and Validity

The issue of reliability and validity are important to any study, whether qualitatively or quantitatively designed. Reliability concerns itself with researcher trustworthiness (Graber, 1991; Lincoln & Guba). In the study, the researcher made an effort to ensure confidentiality and attempted to create an interview atmosphere that exhibited the aura of camaraderie and trust.

For the study to be reliable, the researcher conducted the study with as much precision as possible. This was accomplished by incorporating research procedures that enable the study to be conducted in a consistent and responsible manner. The research should exhibit results that are dependable and consistent (Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard, 1994). Multiple sources of data collection allowed the researcher to establish reliability by strengthening the grounding of theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). Reliability can also be affected by any irresponsible acts in the measurement or assessment process, by instrumental decay, by assessments' that are tedious and time-consuming, or through other factors that may cause alienation to the study's advancement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The current study attempted to avoid these threats to qualitative reliability by having multiple data sources, peer debriefers, and member checks.

Peer debriefers allowed the researcher to have additional reviewers to study the data that emerged. The debriefers were chosen based upon their experience in the area of reading curriculum and instruction. The incorporation of peer debriefers increased the reliability because they were expected to contradict or support the findings introduced to them by the researcher, which aids in trustworthiness. "When the independent judgment ran parallel to that of the investigator, dependability was enhanced. When it did not, there was cause for probing, reviewing, clarification, and reconsideration—though not always revision" (Graber, 1991, p. p. 44). In this study, differences in the perceptions of the researcher and the peer debriefers were minimal.

In addition to peer debriefers, principals were invited to review the transcripts of the interviews to check for accuracy, volunteer additional information, and validate the findings of the researcher (Graber, 1991). This method of review is called member checking. Hatch (2002) defined member checking as the "verification of information or extension of information developed by the researcher" (p. 92). Even though eight principals participated in the study, only four chose to review their transcripts. Out of the four principals who reviewed their transcripts, none refuted any information presented in the transcripts.

Validity discusses the confirmation of facts discovered through research. Developing a precise research agenda will enable the researcher to check and recheck the information received from the respondent. Validity can be dissected further into external and internal validity (Meier & Brudney, 1993). External

validity is concerned with generalizing as it relates to the issues in the study, while internal validity focuses on the causal links that develop from conducting the study and analyzing the data from the study (Cone & Foster, 1993; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Meier & Brudney, 1993).

Participants

Participants for the study were African American elementary principals from a centrally located county in a southeastern state in the United States of America.   Due to the design and the purpose of the study, only principals were interviewed. Assistant principals and reading specialists did not serve as alternates for the principal interviews because it was vital to view the phenomena of reading from only the perception of the principal as an instructional leader. Assistant principals and reading specialists often have an alternate view of the phenomena to be studied, or may not have the power to impact school-wide literacy practices. Their position description and outlook may differ from that of the principal in numerous ways. Specifically, the power the principal has in relation to the assistant principal and the reading specialist was critical. The power of the principals allowed them the opportunity to organize their school and curriculum from their own perception. Eight African American elementary principals were selected to participate in the proposed study.   The researcher intended to interview the complete pool of African American elementary principals, but this goal was not achieved. Principals were chosen through available selection from the county's limited population of African American elementary principals.

Data Sources

Semi-Structured Interviews

Many qualitative researchers value interviews because of the information that is generated. Interviews provide researchers with the necessary data needed to discover the experiences of the participants being studied. The interview process permitted the researcher to probe the participant for information not brought forth during direct observation (Hatch, 2002; Seidman, 1998).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher incorporated a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C). A semi-structured interview can be an in-depth interview (Hatch, 2002) that allows the researcher to have an interview protocol to guide the interview. The interview was designed to explore the perceptions and experiences of the African American elementary principals. However, the protocol does not require a strict wording or order of questions. Rather, the protocol will list topics to cover.

The interviews lasted approximately sixty minutes. Each interview was audiotaped and the researcher wrote field notes to assist in the clarity of the interviews, and to provide a break for the intensity of one-on-one interviewing. The participant had knowledge of the tape-recorder and was insured of confidentiality. Each participant was given information about his or her rights and each signed a permission form. As a researcher, it was my responsibility to protect the rights of the participants volunteering in the study and to comply with the standards expected and supplied by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). In

an effort to further protect the study's participants, I completed the on-line IRB training required by the University of South Florida.

Face to face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight African American principals. One advantage of face-to-face interviews was adaptability, thus allowing the researcher to clarify vague statements or make changes as the interview proceeded. In addition, the face-to-face interview permitted the interviewer to build a relationship of trust and camaraderie with the principals to gain more information (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Seidman, 1998). However, there existed several disadvantages of in-person interviews: the lack of anonymity for the principals; a conceivable opportunity for interviewer bias; and the possible expense of time and money (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Seidman, 1998). The lack of anonymity was addressed by using pseudonyms when the research was analyzed and written. A research reflection journal was maintained by the interviewer to maintain awareness and monitor for possible interviewer bias. The possible expense of time and money was addressed by scheduling the interviews at a time convenient for the researcher and the principal being interviewed.

Principals were asked questions based on the interview protocol developed by the researcher. A second interview was not conducted with the principals because it was not warranted. The interviews allowed the researcher to further understand the experiences of the principals in the study (Seidman, 1998; Patton, 2002). "A basic assumption of in-depth interviewing research is

that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience" (Seidman, 1998, p. 4).

Tape recording

All principal interviews were audio taped in an effort to preserve the contents of the interview session. Tape recording allowed the researcher to review and comprehend the information introduced, discussed, and evaluated during the interview. The audiotape was a tangible portion of data, which confirmed information received during the interview session.   "Tape-recording offers other benefits as well. By preserving the words of the participants, researchers have their original data. If something is not clear in a transcript, the researcher can return to the source and check for accuracy" (Seidman, 1998, p. 97).

Transcribing

Interview transcriptions (Hycner, 1985) were completed by the researcher. Once transcribed, the researcher reviewed the text and highlighted or bracketed important themes, thus crafting a profile (Hycner, 1985; Seidman, 1998). The rationale for crafting a profile, according to Seidman (1998), is to provide an order in which the researcher can convey interview data to readers. Transcribing allowed the researcher to have a written copy of the interview session. The audiotape used during the interview sessions was transcribed in an effort to preserve the interview information on paper. In addition, the researcher had a written copy to share with the elementary principals. In an effort to member check the data received from the principals, the principals were allowed to review

and reflect upon the transcribed information. Principals were once again assured of confidentiality because they were assigned pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of their identity.

Field notes

The second data source was field notes obtained from interviews. The field notes included non-verbal behaviors and the environmental context. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003) field notes are the written accounts of the researcher's experiences while conducting research. The field notes were used as a means of clarification or support. The incorporation of field notes allowed the researcher the opportunity to be reflective and conscious of the events that developed during the qualitative study. "Field notes can provide any study with a personal log that helps the researcher keep track of the development of the project, to visualize how the research plan has been affected by the data collected, and to remain aware of how he or she has been influenced by the data" (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p. 111). According to Hatch (2002), field notes are taken while the researcher is in the field observing individuals and the setting. The field notes include descriptions of contexts, actions, record of the physical setting, and conversations written in as much detail as possible considering the constraints placed on the researcher at the given time (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The field note data was used as a means to validate the findings from the interviews. In addition, the field notes provided the researcher with the opportunity to further explore the attitudes, social interactions and other information from the principals.

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Research Reflection Journal

The last data source was a reflective journal (Appendix D) kept by the researcher. The purpose of the journal was to allow the researcher the opportunity to reflect on the events that occurred during the interviews and to discuss, describe, and clarify events that occur during the development of the study (Burgess, 1981). Hatch (2002) suggested it is relevant to keep a separate journal in efforts to moderate impressions and preliminary interpretations that go beyond the information written in the field notes. Since a constant comparative method of analysis was employed, it was pertinent that the researcher be consistent in journaling. The researcher journaled daily in efforts to stay abreast of any personal bias, emerging information, and/or other events. In addition, the researcher remained focused on the purpose of the study and gained necessary insight to understand principals and their perceptions of reading in their schools. As a qualitative researcher, the importance of remaining reflective as the study developed could not be understated. The act of being reflective allowed the researcher to be aware of the influence and bias as it pertained to the study. The reflective journal allowed the researcher to remain aware of their personal "belief systems and the cultural norms that have helped shaped their identities" (Slifkin, 2001, p. 5). The journal also allowed for emerging hypotheses.

<div align="center">

Procedure

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For a collective case study, which leads to grounded theory to be effective and provide meaningful data, the researcher created research procedures (Appendix B) to develop theory properly. Once the IRB approval was granted to

conduct research in the county, the researcher contacted the African American elementary principals for the study. The principals to be studied were an available sample from the county's population of African American elementary school principals (Hatch, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Once approval was granted and the sample obtained, the principals were contacted by phone to initiate and schedule an interview. During the face-to-face interviews, field notes were taken to clarify points made by the principals, document physical settings as well as social interactions. In addition, principals were ensured of the confidentiality in relation to their interview responses. Once the first interview was conducted, the researcher began transcribing the tapes in efforts to code emerging data as it was collected (Charmaz, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and began journaling in the research reflection journal. The researcher listened to the audiotape from the interview and began typing the words stated by the principal and interviewer. The researcher composed a transcription text similar to a script from a movie or play. The researcher made every effort to include pauses, sounds, and interruptions that occurred while in the interview setting. Once the script was completed, the coding of the data began. "Through coding, we start to define and categorize our data. In grounded theory coding, we create codes as we study our data" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 515). As the researcher began coding, thus began the initiation of theory development.

The transcript text was reviewed to discover important points relevant to the research questions. These points were coded according to their relevancy to

the research questions. These coded points were placed on construction paper to create a new text different from the transcript text. This new transcript was reviewed for common themes. These themes were coded and classified into categories that reflected the purpose of the study.

The field notes were reviewed for important points. The points were highlighted by the researcher. The highlighted information was extracted from the field notes and collected on a page for further analysis. This information was coded and reviewed for more commonalities relevant to the study. The new information received from new notes was assigned themes and these themes were placed into categories relevant to study.

The information received from the interviews and the field notes were reviewed for common themes and issues relevant to the study. As the data was reviewed, emerging themes became apparent. These emerging themes were placed into categories relevant to the study and coded in efforts to develop grounded theory.

Throughout the study, a reflective journal was maintained. The journal was used as a means to support or to contradict issues introduced during the interviews and field notes. The journal gave the researcher the opportunity to clarify, comment and question events occurring during interviews and visits. In addition the researcher documented and commented on various social interactions that occurred prior to the interview and during the course of the interview. The journal was reviewed to highlight pertinent information relating to the study. The highlighted information was coded and placed on construction

paper for a more intense review. This review led to themes relevant to the study. These themes were assigned categories that reflected the purposes of the study and were compared and contrasted to the themes developed from the other two data sources.

The data from the interviews, field notes and the journal was organized and analyzed separately for the purposes of the study. Once each data source was analyzed, the results from each data source were reviewed for commonalities and differences. The common themes were extracted from the data sources, placed on construction paper, and placed into categories. The differences were noted and placed in the appropriate context to thoroughly discuss the topic. This method of triangulation (Patton, 2002) increases the credibility and reliability of the research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was the search for meaning among the topic being studied. Once the meanings were discovered, they were organized, written, and communicated in a manner to disseminate to the world of academia (Hatch, 2002). A constant comparative method was employed to analyze the data collected from the principals. The data from the interviews, field notes, and reflection journal was organized separately (Seidman, 1998; Patton, 2002). The interviews were transcribed, continuously reviewed, and codes were created for emerging data. The field notes, like the interviews, were reviewed on a continuous basis to code emerging data. Coding enabled the researcher to connect the common themes introduced by research data. The data source

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resembled a script with the principal and the researcher being the primary characters. The assigning of codes enabled the researcher to group common occurrences and themes as they emerged. The last data source, a research reflection journal, was a continuous process throughout the study.

Once the data was organized, each data source was reviewed separately. When the data was organized separately, it was then analyzed separately. After the data was analyzed, the researcher convened a peer debriefing session. Three qualitative researchers with an educational background in reading curriculum and instruction served as peer debriefers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The debriefers were chosen due to their knowledge of reading curriculum and instruction. Two of the debriefers received their doctorate in curriculum and instruction specializing in reading and language arts. The third debriefer is preparing to defend her proposal in the same program in the near future. Incorporating a peer debriefing session into the research process added credibility to the study and increases internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer debriefers reviewed the transcripts and the codes that emerged from the data collection to check for consistency and clarity. Each peer debriefer was given a copy of the original transcripts, the highlighted transcripts, and the themes and categories script to review the data analysis process taken by the researcher. Individuals participating in this review were not informed of the principals' identities due to confidentiality reasons. Prior to the debriefing session, the peer debriefers were trained to analyze and code data. The researcher provided a refresher training to assist in the analysis process.

The identified themes were placed together on a single script by highlighting pertinent information from the transcription text. The new version allowed the transcripts to be analyzed with a strict eye (Seidman, 1998). This allowed the information received from the data sources to be compared and contrasted case by case, and data source by data source. Charmaz (2000) stated in order for the constant comparative method of grounded theory to be properly administered, the researcher should "(a) compare different individuals, which may or may not include their perceptions, experiences, beliefs or situations, (b) compare data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time, (c) compare incident with incident, (d) compare data with categories and, (e) compare a category with other categories" (p. 515).

An additional set of themes and categories emerged from the comparing and contrasting of the data. The researcher highlighted information that stood out to him or her. "As you read, ask yourself which passages are the most compelling, those that you are just not willing to put aside. Underline them. Now you are ready to craft a narrative based on them" (Seidman, 1998, p. 103).

Summary of Chapter

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the design and procedures to be utilized for this qualitative study. The study was a collective case study (Stake, 2000) using an emphasis of grounded theory. In addition, a constant comparative method of data analysis was utilized to review themes as they emerged from the data sources. The constant comparative model was used to

analyze the data with the research questions guiding the data collection and analysis.

Eight African American elementary principals were interviewed for this collective case study. An interview guide was created in efforts to guide the interview. In addition to the interviews, field notes were taken and a research reflection journal was maintained by the research to remain aware of biasness and other important information that emerged during the data collection.

The collective case study allowed the researcher to study the African American elementary principals as a collective unit, but also as individuals. This method provided the opportunity to explore and discuss the principals' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences as it relates to reading curriculum and instruction.

Understanding and discovering the perceptions of African American elementary principals in the area of reading is pertinent to student success and school success. This study allowed principals to voice and to discuss their doubts, concerns, experiences, and successes through qualitative means, thus serving as a means to inform the fields of reading and educational leadership about the importance of understanding principals thinking about literacy in their schools. The information brought forth in this qualitative study will be disseminated to individuals in the educational field, political arena, and others who have a genuine concern for education.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter presented the reported perceptions of eight African American elementary principals in the area of reading curriculum and instruction in a central Florida County derived from a collective case study. The results of the study are presented in a narrative form to provide a detailed and descriptive picture of the data that emerged. Through interviews, field notes, and a researcher reflection journal, themes, patterns, and categories emerged in relation to reading curriculum and instruction.

This qualitatively designed study was developed for the purpose of investigating five questions:

- What are the perceived relationships among African American elementary principals, their perceived linguistic experiences, and their perceptions of school literacy?

- What are the perceived experiences of African American principals regarding reading instruction in the elementary schools?

- Based on experience as a teacher and an administrator, how do African American principals perceive reading to be addressed in their schools?

- How does prior experience with reading influence African American principals' perceptions of their leadership of reading instruction in their schools?

- What principal-initiated methods or approaches are used to assist students with reading achievement on standardized tests?

The research questions guided the collection and analysis of data reported in the collective case study.

Eleven African American elementary principals met the selection criteria for the research. These criteria were to be an African American principal in a school with grades PK through fifth grades or kindergarten through fifth grades. Eight African American elementary principals were interviewed for the study although eleven met the researcher's criteria. One principal declined due to lack of experience, two others were contacted numerous times via phone and e-mail and chose not to respond to the interview request. Therefore, a total of eight African American elementary principals participated in the study. The participants will be discussed in chronological order of their interviews. After the principals have been introduced and discussed individually, the principals' responses will be discussed as a cohort followed by the answering of the research questions. Table one provides the demographic data of the participants. The cohort discussion will introduce the themes and categories (Table two) that emerged during the data analysis and I will state conclusions immediately followed by support from the principals' interview, field notes, and the research reflection journal (Cone & Foster, 1993). From this information, a comparison and contrast of the cases will be revealed.

The Principals

Tina: "Reading is life, it's like blood"

Principal Tina is a first year principal in the county. She has a total of seventeen years in education, eleven as a teacher, and six years as an assistant principal.

She has experience teaching reading in the elementary grades and believes that there is "no perfect plan for every child" (interview, December 2003) in regards to reading instruction. This personal philosophy of Principal Tina is based on the concept that students enter school with different experiences and personal expectations. These differences may assist or hinder their learning to read.

Principal Tina defines reading as the understanding, expressing, and sharing of written text. In her opinion, reading is more than just the reading of words. According to Tina "reading is the comprehending of printed text" (interview, December 2003). If students are to be successful in life they must be able to read and apply the knowledge. "Reading is life; it's like blood" (interview, December 2003).

The reading curriculum used in the school is the Harcourt Trophies (www.harcourtschool.com) series adopted by the county. The program consists of ninety minutes of uninterrupted reading instructional time. The school also utilizes other resources to assist their students in becoming proficient readers: Sing, Spell, Read & Write (www.singspell.com), which is a phonics based program design to help the school's first graders; and Leap Frog (www.leapfrog.com), an interactive learning program. These programs are

supplementary programs that are included in hopes to improve academic achievement.

In Tina's opinion, there are several components of a successful reading program: exposure to written text; the ability to articulate words aloud; shared reading experiences; teacher read alouds on a daily basis; children imitating and acquiring fluency; singing and reading words; and opportunities for students to hear themselves read. She based these components on her experience as an elementary teacher and the courses she took in college.

Teachers in Tina's school receive professional development through several avenues. They receive professional development from the book company representatives, as needed, to help the administration and faculty to familiarize themselves with the reading curriculum and effective reading strategies. Principal Tina mentioned the professional development is beneficial to her faculty majority of the time. The district also initiates numerous workshops that teachers may attend to increase their knowledge of reading instruction. Since Tina is a principal that believes in remaining aware of current reading research, she encourages her faculty to approach her with articles, conferences, and other workshop opportunities available outside of the school district. Her only stipulation is that teachers make a conscious effort to implement the knowledge they gain to enable their students to be successful in reading, which is difficult to know because she is not always able to observe the teachers on content knowledge gained from professional development opportunities.

Tina can be described as a principal that supports reading and believes children learn in different ways. She supports her teachers gaining knowledge to assist students in becoming life-long readers.

Fran: "Reading is a way out of poverty"

Principal Fran is the leader of a Title I (www.ed.gov/programs/titleipara) school in a rural area of the county. She asked to review the interview questions prior to beginning the interview because she wanted to be precise. She has twenty-six plus years in education and taught reading for sixteen years at the elementary level.

When asked about her personal definition of reading, she gave an answer with social and educational implications:

> Reading is a way out of poverty. It's a way of communicating. It's a way of understanding many other world issues. Without reading you would have a difficult time of being able to communicate effectively. So, I really, really, do think reading is a must. It is a survivor tool. It is a survivor technique. It opens up all kinds of doors. It opens up all kinds of worlds. When one is able to read and understand what is being read, it gives them a distinct advantage (interview, December 2003).

She is the leader of her school's reading program and she believes she provides the necessary organization and support needed to ensure her teachers and students receive quality training and instruction in reading. Her role as the leader includes her being a facilitator, as well as a delegator.

Fran's childhood shaped the way she promotes reading in her school. As a child, she was an avid reader and believed that reading helped her to learn about the world in which we live. Reading opened doors and windows of opportunities for her. "You can learn about life if you're able to read" (interview, December 2003).

The school utilizes the district reading curriculum, which is Harcourt Trophies (www.harcourtschool.com) and incorporates other resources to raise achievement on state mandated tests, strengthen reading skills, and actively engage students. Accelerated Reader (AR) (www.renalearn.com), Star (www.renalearn.com), and Culyer Reading Strategies (Newman, 2002) are programs that she believes have had a positive effect on the students.

AR (www.renalearn.com) is a program that assigns points to books based on their reading levels. Once students have read a book, they take a computerized test about the book and they receive AR (www.renalearn.com) points based on their test score. More specifically, it is a tracking system used to aid students in becoming more efficient readers by testing their knowledge of books they have read. Star (www.renalearn.com) is another program of Renaissance Learning. The Star (www.renalearn.com) program is a reading assessment computer program used to determine a student's reading level. The program tests vocabulary and context clues more than reading level comprehension. The students are given the test based upon their current grade level. Star is the assessment system used to determine what level the child should be reading in the AR book. Culyer Reading Strategies (Newman, 2002) is

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a program that works to increase the reading comprehension levels of students. "The program uses an indirect model, where administrators and key teachers meet once a month for all-day development sessions. The educators then relay the information and plans to their entire school, where principals learn how to administer the most effective reading strategies and teachers learn how best to apply these strategies to the classroom" (Newman, 2002).

According to Fran, a successful reading program encompasses various components: quality reading teachers; teachers who actively engage students; modeling; school leader who values reading; a school leader who believes in the teachers and the students; and teachers who are willing to give every child an opportunity to learn and be successful. For this to occur principals should hold themselves responsible for remaining aware of current reading research, reading trends, and reading standards and mandates. In her opinion, principals should want what's best for their students to be successful, thus making it important to incorporate current information relevant to the area of reading.

Whether the state sets standards, guidelines or goals, as principal you should always set goals for your school. So to me, being successful does not depend on what the state has decided my children need to learn. Success is what is actually being taught at the school. And what the school gives the kids need to learn. You should not have to have a state mandate and tell us what needs to be taught; we should do that ourselves. It should be an automatic thing that this is what the students need to be taught at these grade levels (interview, December 2003).

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There are many ways principals can include current research. Principal Fran's elementary school has learning communities, which are opportunities for faculty to share new and exciting articles and books in the field of reading and education in general. The administration and faculty often read books and articles and forward the information to other staff members. Other times the teachers and administrators engage in round table discussions at grade level meetings or faculty meetings.

Principal Fran's faculty has the opportunity to attend district held workshops and other models of trainings. Fran values professional development because she understands the importance of remaining current on reading instruction.

Struggling readers are identified through teacher observations, test data from guidance, reading inventories and FCAT (www.fldoe.org) scores. Identifying the students in this manner allows them to be placed at their instructional reading level and not their frustration level. If a child is identified as a struggling reader, he/she receives morning or afternoon tutoring to bring them to grade level. Often this individualized attention is needed to increase students' reading achievement.

Principal Fran is a school leader who makes reading a priority for all faculty and staff in her school. She not only leads her school in making reading a priority, she sets examples. The examples are what assist in motivating students to become life long readers.

Betty: "Reading helps you to operate in other peoples' worlds"

Principal Betty is a soft-spoken woman with a great deal of experience in education. The majority of her thirty-three years in education has been as an administrator. Her education experience as it relates to reading instruction includes various coursework in reading and she often engages in reading current reading research to stay informed of the trends occurring in the field.

Her personal definition of reading is "comprehending and understanding of written words" (interview, December 2003). The comprehending and understanding enables individuals to communicate efficiently and effectively when needed. In her opinion, if students are to prosper, they must be able to read and apply what is being read in the appropriate situations.

Principal Betty has many roles in her school's reading program. She is ultimately responsible for the reading program and ensuring it is delivered properly to the students. It is her responsibility to remain abreast of reading standards at the state and federal levels to guarantee her teachers are prepared to teach reading, students are learning necessary skills and strategies, and that her students are ready for standardized tests. "I provide leadership so that each person can get what they need for the students of this elementary school to be successful" (interview, December 2003).

The importance of reading cannot be overstated for Betty. In her opinion, she is motivated internally to promote positive reading experiences in her school. Reading is a part of her personal, as well as professional life. Betty is an avid reader and encourages her students and staff to do the same. One can often walk into the school and find the office staff reading children's books as a way of

promoting reading throughout the school. Other ways reading is promoted is by giving awards to students, having author talks, character days, and special reading projects completed by the students. In Betty's words, "reading helps you to operate in other peoples' worlds. It exposes you to other environments, and cultures" (interview, December 2003). This exposure is what assists in building students background knowledge, which is an important feature in adding to the comprehension and motivation of students.

For a reading program to be effective in Betty's school, it must include the "Fab Five" components from the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*(NCLB): phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension strategies. It is also relevant to have adequate instructional time that includes ninety minutes of uninterrupted daily reading instruction for all grades. In addition, Betty states that when parents participate in their child's reading education, students tend to be more prepared.

Betty believes principals who are knowledgeable about state reading standards and research tend to have strong reading programs. She feels it is relevant for principals to read and then try to implement beneficial strategies that may assist in improving students' overall reading experience. Even though she supports the implementation of new information, she recognizes that it takes time and commitment from teachers for things of this nature to be successful. If the teachers are committed to incorporating new strategies or programs, then it will probably be successful due to the overwhelming support. Betty recognizes that

the principal is only one person in a school setting, and it takes the dedication of other individuals to ensure a program works and is effective.

To ensure that teachers remain aware of current reading trends, Betty encourages teachers to attend professional development opportunities. Professional development occurs in several ways in Betty's school. The administration and teachers collaborate internally by sharing books, articles, and initiating professional study groups. There are also external training opportunities offered by the school district and consultants.

The professional development allows Betty and her teachers to identify and assist struggling readers and effectively assesses their reading level. Through training and experience, teachers are able to look at previous test scores from FCAT (www.fldoe.org), teacher assessments and observations, and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (http://dibels.uoregon.edu.index.php) to identify the readers and determine their goals and objectives. They assist the struggling readers by utilizing various reading strategies, tutoring, and constant monitoring.

Betty knows with the constant change in the education system it is pertinent for students to receive a quality foundation in reading. Additionally, she feels a well-established instructional leader that makes reading a priority aids in the preparation of academically savvy students who value and love reading.
Sue: "Reading of material to gain knowledge"

As one walks into Principal Sue's humble, visitor-friendly school, it is obvious reading is a priority. The school is an older, remodeled school. The

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principal makes her own copies. In addition, every staff member that comes through the office door makes an effort to speak to the child sitting in the clinic and me. On the table are magazines, and on the shelves, children's literature books, which another child who is in the office for disciplinary reasons takes the time to search through. The receptionist is tutoring a student in reading and language arts and encourages the student to tell her a story prior to writing it for a class project.

Principal Sue has twenty-nine years of experience in education. Fifteen of those years have been as a school administrator, while the other fourteen have been as a classroom teacher. During her tenure as a teacher, she achieved her certification in reading and took coursework in reading curriculum and instruction while working towards her master's degree.

Her personal definition of reading is the "reading of material to gain knowledge" (interview, December 2003). This knowledge enables individuals, young and old, to explore and experience new things while reading. This definition and explanation of reading motivates her internally to promote reading in her school. From her experience, she knows and values reading because of its effects on life.

Sue's school is a school that takes pride in literacy education. Often her role as a literacy leader in the school's reading program leads her to give books to students to increase their personal libraries, tutor struggling readers, and model successful reading practices. In addition, the school has celebrations to award students for positive reading gains and achievement goals.

Because reading is relevant to the school, Sue participates in the several reading initiatives to assist her school in advancing their academic and standardized achievement performance. The elementary school is a Reading First School, which provides additional materials and trainings for the teachers and administrators through the NCLB (2001) legislation. The school also participates in the Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence (FLARE) (www.edcollege.ucf.edu/flare/Flarehome.htm), and the school received the Comprehensive School Reform Grant (www.fldoe.org) that also provides additional funding to schools that qualify for the grant.

Sue believes the components of a successful reading program consist of the "Fab Five", which is part of the NCLB Act (2001). The program supports the inclusion of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies.

The components of NCLB (2001) require principals to be knowledgeable about current reading research and mandates. Sue believes principals need and should know what to look for when they enter and observe their classroom teachers. If principals are to be effective and efficient instructional leaders, they need current knowledge to increase their awareness.

Teachers and administrators receive trainings on current reading initiatives in several ways. The district provides different trainings or workshops in the area of reading. Since the school is a Reading First School, training is delivered on a continuous basis. The Reading Coach often trains the faculty of the school in reading instruction as needed.

Principal Sue is a person who supports reading. She believes in acquiring knowledge to be a power and information source to her faculty and students. In her opinion, if we go back to the basics, and put more faith in the teachers our students may prosper. In her words, "I don't think we need more programs. We need to let teachers teach" (interview, December, 2003).

Carey: "Everything we do is hinged on reading"

Principal Carey is the leader of a Title I (www.ed.gov/programs/titleipara) school located in the northern sector of this central Florida County. There is evidence throughout the main office and the principal's office that reading occurs daily. Books and magazines for all levels line tables and shelves. Students come into the front office with library books in their hands and sit quietly and read while waiting to be acknowledged.

Carey discussed that her educational experience in reading occurred in her Master's degree coursework. This concentration of reading during her Masters allowed her to have more experience going into the classroom. She was able to relate and help students to appreciate reading and the power and influence it has over people's lives. According to her, "reading is the foundation of everything and everything we do is hinged on reading" (interview, December 2003). That makes motivating and promoting reading in her school a personal matter because she wants all her students to be successful.

Carey has established several mechanisms to ensure reading success is implemented, celebrated and appreciated throughout the school. Trophies are awarded to students who have met their reading goal each nine weeks. The

school sponsors family and library nights to extend literacy to students' family members. And most importantly, reading is taught for no less than ninety minutes a day.

Several programs are utilized in Carey's school in addition to the Harcourt Trophies mandated by the district. AR and the Star (www.renlearn.com) program are used as well as the Compass Lab, which is a computerized program used to track student success in reading. The program is designed for the student to work on an individual basis.

When asked to discuss her personal definition of reading, Carey elaborated to ensure I received a complete and comprehensive understanding of her conception.

> Reading would be a thorough understanding of printed text, but before you get to the thorough understanding there has to be a sense of decoding words; there has to be a process of understanding what is expected from you in terms of the reading so there needs to be some sort of purpose setting first. As adults we kind of figure out things when we choose material, but when we give students material to read, we need to make sure that they understand the purpose; that they have a background before reading so that understanding is easier for them to have. Many times we give them reading material and they have no concept of what you're talking about and then we wonder why they don't understand. They don't understand because they don't have the background that's needed to appreciate the material that they have (interview, December 2003).

This definition leads to an explanation of her role in her school's reading program. She views herself as the instructional leader who bears the ultimate responsibility of what occurs in her school on a daily basis. To be effective in her school's reading program, she is visible among her faculty and students. She considers herself to be a hands-on principal because she ensures students are gaining the necessary skills to acquire literacy.

Unlike other principals in the study, Carey approaches the components of a successful reading program from another perspective. Carey believes the most important component of a successful reading program is an enthusiastic teacher who is grounded in the steps to promote success. Children should also be able to identify with whatever is being read. It is important for students to view people that reflect themselves. This is especially true for minorities. Teachers should include books from various cultures to invoke a sense of pride among minority students. They must be allowed to build their background knowledge. In addition to building knowledge, it is relevant to include their prior knowledge to assist in the building. The inclusion of prior knowledge enables students to connect their world with their school world. This allows them to actively participate in their learning. Lastly, teachers should also provide a purpose for reading for students to understand why they are doing what they are doing.

Carey admits she makes her job a priority. Reading and learning is a personal matter for her. She makes every effort to learn more about the field of reading to assist her students and staff with being successful. She fully understands the challenges facing students in today's schools in the age of

accountability and makes every effort to provide effective instructional leadership so her students and staff may prosper.

Elaine: "The ability of a person to decipher and comprehend the written word"

Principal Elaine's school is located in a rural area of the county. The school is categorized as a Title One and a Reading First School.   Many of the individuals in this area are farmers or migrant workers who work hard for what they have. Elaine has thirty years in education. Unlike other principals in the study, she received her bachelors and masters degrees in history. This allows her to view reading from the perception of the content areas. Her experience includes teaching secondary social studies and African American History on the community college level.

> When I was in middle school, one of the things that we always complained about is that fact that the kids were not good readers. And it was very difficult to teach them math, science or social studies because students couldn't read the text. And that was especially true with social studies because if you can't read the material then you have to find other ways to get it across because they don't have any idea. They can't determine what the topic is really all about. So that's been my experience, and once I got into administration, I've been in elementary administration all of the time so there's been an overriding emphasis on reading in the elementary schools and my training has been where I received more skills. I've had the Reading First Training (interview, December 2003).

The experiences Elaine had in the classroom enable her to personally define reading as "the ability of a person to decipher and comprehend the written word. Put it into meaningful form where they can understand what is being related to them" (interview, December 2003). She went further to discuss that students must move beyond "calling words" and head towards the understanding of the words.

Elaine views her role in her school's reading program as ultimately an overseer and leader. It is her job to review the total picture and provide support to teachers and resource personnel. She also ensures that the school has the necessary materials, schedules and training.

When asked what motivates her to promote reading, Elaine provided an elaborate reflection.

It always bothers me when I see people who are out in the community who don't have those skills that they need and I know they don't have those skills that they need and sometimes they have personal problems. They can sometimes trace them all back if they were better students or readers, they probably wouldn't have made some of the choices that they made. And they wouldn't be in the situation that they're in. So in a sense, I'm looking at it from kind of an end result. I would rather do what I can to make sure that these kids are good readers because that opens up the whole world for them. And by that I mean, if you can read even if you're not taught a particular subject, if you can read well, you can teach yourself. If you can read well, you can open up any doors that are

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available to you simply by knowing where to get the information or

knowing what to do. If you can't read, you're kind of stifled and you don't

even try to go into other avenues. If you look at data, I think you will find

that most of those kids that don't read well are the ones who are more

likely to drop out once they get to high school. They are more likely to

struggle in high school and if they do finally graduate, they're not going to

push it any further. If there is a desire to go beyond that, you will find

there are so many road blocks that these kids are more likely to give up

rather than push ahead. So, therefore it's just a stumbling block if you

don't get that basic foundation for reading and I feel like the better we train

them in terms of reading, we're going to find they're going to be more

successful and it's going to help society as a whole (interview, December

2003).

The specific reading programs used in the school are the district chosen

series, Harcourt Trophies (www.harcourtschool.com); Sing, Spell, Read, and

Write (www.singspell.com) for the first grade; AR and Star (www.renalearn.com);

and Leap Frog (www.leapfrog.com). Since the school is a Reading First School

(www.ed.gov), students are scheduled for ninety minutes of uninterrupted

reading instruction.

Elaine's background and experience provides an interesting perception of

reading instruction. Having experience on the secondary level allowed her to see

the importance of reading across the curriculum, which allows reading to be

taught in every subject area. The experiences assist her in being a hands-on

principal that interacts with students and teachers. Her love of reading

encourages and motivates students to read for their present and their future.

Vivian: "Practice what they teach"

Vivian is an energetic person with many plans for her school. With thirty-

one years in education, she has experience at the elementary and secondary

levels. Her reading experience includes teaching English, taking courses in

reading curriculum and instruction; operating a preschool with a strong reading

focus; participation in the FLARE (www.edcollege.ucf.edu/flare/flarehome.htm);

and the various training opportunities included in the Reading First Grant

Initiative (www.ed.gov).

The previously mentioned experiences led Vivian to define reading as the

inclusion of phonics, comprehension of the written text, vocabulary, and fluency.

These are some of the necessary components of an effective reading program

as well. Also included are strong, prepared teachers, who are enthusiastic about

teaching and take the time to "practice what they teach" (interview, December

2003). A supportive administrator that places the needs of her students and

teachers above their own also aids the reading program.

The importance of reading goes back to childhood experiences for Vivian.

The love of reading and books were instilled in her at a young age. This love

motivates her to promote reading throughout her school and community. Ways

she promotes reading are by having book give-aways or drawings for students to

receive books; modeling, which allows students to view another individual

focusing on positive reading interaction; "books and breakfast" is an incentive

that invites certain students to have breakfast with the principal and share a book of their choice; and awards for the most AR (www.renalearn.com) points gained in a nine week period. In addition, the school encourages reading among the family and community by having Family Night, which allows students to invite family members to the media center to read books together; community sponsored reading incentives that provide donations to the school to purchase books for students and additional reading materials for the school; and Media Night combines computers and literacy to allow family members to research topics with their children.

Professional development comes in a variety of ways at Vivian's elementary school. Since it is a Reading First (www.ed.gov) school, administrators and faculty receive continuous training on reading instruction. She admits that her teachers can be somewhat resistant towards the additional training. In a perfect world, her staff would be excited and eager to attend training and implement their new knowledge, but in reality, they resist because of the other constraints and stipulations being placed on them through county, state, and federal mandates. Despite this reluctance, Vivian stresses to her teachers that the reading initiative is here to stay and they must do what is necessary to increase their professional knowledge, student achievement, and students' overall academic success.

Struggling readers are identified through several methods: DIBELS (http://dibels.uoregon.edu/index.php), a reading diagnostic test; teacher made assessments such as running records, and the Compass Lab (www.polk-

fl.net/DrNERobertsEl/compass_computer_lab.htm). The readers are assisted by
receiving after school tutoring and tutoring during school by Title I
(www.ed.gov/programs/titleipara) tutors.

Vivian is a principal who believes in involving the community and initiating
creative means to promote reading. As one looks around the school, the
evidence of reading is prevalent. Rooms boast of innovative reading corners that
allow students to be comfortable and have positive reading interactions. Her
leadership will continue to allow the school to grow with an appreciation for
reading.

Sarah: "Acquisition and application of knowledge"

Nestled in a middle-income neighborhood in a central Florida county is the
youngest of the principals in the study. Principal Sarah is a first year principal in
a non-title one school who has a total of ten years educational experience.

Sarah's experience in education includes three and a half years as a
classroom teacher. During this experience she had various reading instructional
opportunities. She taught language arts at the middle school level, which
allowed her to utilize and incorporate reading strategies she believed to be
beneficial to students' academic growth.

When asked to give a personal definition of reading, Sarah described
reading as being "the acquisition of knowledge and the application of it. Not just
the reading to receive knowledge, but the ability to apply the knowledge"
(interview, December 2003). According to Sarah, students should know how to
read for all purposes. Reading for enjoyment is important to initiate and motivate

students, but they must learn how to read for information. It is this type of reading that shapes the majority of the state mandated tests. It is this type of reading material that students must pass on the FCAT (www.fldoe.org) to proceed to the next level of their academic education.

Due to the pressures of state mandated tests and governmental requirements, Sarah's perception of her role in her school's reading program is of great importance. She provides the overall leadership for the school's reading program in terms of motivation, resource personnel, and always makes reading a focal point to her staff as well as her students.

On a daily basis Sarah sees and recognizes the necessity of an education. She sees the necessity of being able to read. According to Sarah, students often come to school without the necessary foundation to be successful in reading. This is especially true for some minority students in Sarah's school. Sometimes the students lack parental support, access to materials, background knowledge, or the motivation.

This leads to Sarah's thoughts on the components of a successful reading program. The most important component for Sarah is to have reading instruction and curriculum that builds background knowledge for the students. It is also relevant to have a program that incorporates and effectively utilizes vocabulary acquisition. Including phonics instruction, main ideas, and sequencing makes the program complete, but Sarah is quick to remember the struggling readers in her school. A successful reading program also includes paths to identify, accommodate, and motivate struggling readers. Sarah believes it is important to

know and learn the students you are dealing with and their reading styles. Research is important in composing the proper program because in her words, "what works for one school may not work for another" (interview, December 2003). She is an advocate of parental involvement and volunteerism. Tutors are actively sought out to assist the struggling readers.

Principals who are knowledgeable about reading research and current reading mandates aids in the promotion, motivation, and activation of successful reading programs. "Research allows you to be more informed about what's out there and gives you ideas on how to effectively utilize what you have. And so the more information you have about something, the more informed you're going to be and the better decisions you can make" (interview, December 2003).

Professional development plays a part of being knowledgeable about current reading trends and issues. Administrators and teachers in Sarah's school receive training through the district by attending professional development days, state and national conferences, and other workshops. Unlike other principals mentioned in the study, Sarah's school is not a title one school, thus limiting its resources. As an administrator, Sarah feels it is her charge to search for grants and free opportunities that will assist her teachers in the area of reading instruction and curriculum. She stresses the relevance of planning accordingly when funds are limited for professional development.

Sarah is an enthusiastic, young principal with ideas and the motivation to support it. She has a love for reading that she spreads to her students and staff through modeling and remaining a constant means of support. Not only does

she venture into her teachers' classrooms to read to students, but she also reads to her faculty during meetings as a way of sharing the importance of reading. According to her, helping her faculty remain aware of the importance of reading enables them to focus and forward this importance on to their students in order for them to be successful at the present time, but also in their future academic endeavors.

The Cohort

The purpose of this portion of the chapter is to discuss the themes, patterns, and categories that emerged within and across the principal cohort. Table two provides a visual of the themes, the principals that discussed the themes, and the categories that defined the themes. A brief discussion of the themes will take place with comments from the principals to add support.

The themes in the study were placed into two specific categories; public requirements and personal perceptions. I defined public requirements as those themes that are initiated and required by the local school district, the large southeastern state, and sometimes the federal government. Personal perceptions are the themes that emerged based upon the personal and professional experiences, expectations, and/or the power exerted by the principal as a leader. The personal perceptions may influence how the principals choose to exert their power in relation to their school's reading program.

FCAT (www.fldoe.org)

FCAT (www.fldoe.org) is a subject that causes some principals to cringe. The body language some of the principals exhibited at the mention of FCAT

(www.fldoe.org) was an attitude of frustration. The principals rolled their eyes,

smacked their lips, sighed heavily, and tighten their arms across their chests as

an act of silent defiance of the state test. FCAT (www.fldoe.org) has been known

to cause stress in administrators, teachers, and students because of the

pressure to perform. Principals worked hard to ensure their students are not only

prepared to take the test, but also prepared to achieve the necessary scores to

promote them to the next grade level.   Many of the schools in the study had

signs that positively promoted FCAT (www.fldoe.org). The signs offered

encouraging words for the students to read, reading and math strategies, and

hopefully offered an incentive to score well. Despite the positive encouragement,

some principals question the limitations the test sets on students. Some

principals voiced concerns about the time allotted for students to take the test,

while others worried about the low ESE scores and how they affected the overall

population of the school.

> Tina: "Some students need additional time on the FCAT. If they were
>
> allowed more time, they would probably achieve a higher score."
>
> Sue: "We are focusing on reading and other areas tested rather than
>
> reaching the total child."
>
> Elaine: "There is a great deal of pressure at the elementary level with
>
> FCAT. My faculty is concerned about reading and the FCAT data. Last
>
> year our students performed well on the test, but at the end, when the
>
> ESE scores were incorporated, it hurt our overall school grade. This is not

fair to the students or to the teachers that worked hard to include ESE

student scores."

While Tina, Sue, and Elaine have reservations about FCAT

(www.fldoe.org), another principal appreciated its impact on reading instruction.

Vivian: "The reading materials that we use, the methods of instruction, the

extra and added dimensions such as extending the day and the staff

development must all be high yield components."

FCAT (www.fldoe.org) is indeed a subject that reveals various attitudes

and beliefs. The majority of the principals in the study do not speak favorably

towards the FCAT (www.fldoe.org), while others think it's a great idea. Clearly

FCAT (www.fldoe.org) is an area that conjures a debate; a debate that will

continue as long as the test is in Florida's schools.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

The reading initiative has arguably sparked praise, controversy, and

concern throughout the country. The initial purpose of NCLB (2001) was to

incorporate stronger accountability mechanisms and increase student

achievement among America's schools. In addition, the act was intended to

change the cultural composition of the schools to enable the less fortunate

students to have a better educational experience (www.ed.gov/nclb). The

pressures from the local, state, and federal governments have principals

scattering to incorporate and utilize effective reading programs and strategies to

assist their students. In addition, some of the principals view the NCLB (2001)

act as a mechanism to divert our country back into the system of segregation in

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an indirect way. Two of the principals in particular, viewed the programs of NCLB as a means to cause division among the races. In addition, with the new school alternatives such as choice, magnet and charter schools, this causes additional separation.

Betty and Sue may not necessarily support the NCLB (2001) initiative, but they support the reading instructional components introduced by the act. They believe that phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies are all valuable tools in a successful reading program. These tools will assist in students being successful in reading. In addition to those components, many of the principals are proponents of the ninety minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction for all grades.

Fran: "Reading comes first.   You don't interrupt students on the intercom. Interruptions cause children's train of thought to break."

NCLB (2001) is a controversial topic in our society today. The act has brought about additional pressures and standards that children are expected to accomplish. This additional pressure on students has also added pressures on the principals and teachers. Despite this fact, principals are making every effort to ensure students and teachers are prepared to meet the qualifications necessary to succeed. The eight principals introduced in this study believe in professional development and professional sharing as avenues for their teachers to learn additional material that will benefit their students. In addition, they continuously search for programs and methods further prepare their students for standardized tests and academic achievement. Three of the principals

discussed the relevancy of having energetic and positive teachers. In their opinion this is an initial step in ensuring students are prepared and are positive towards learning.

County Reading Curriculum

All of the principals discussed the county curriculum. The researcher posed the interview question, "how is your school's reading curriculum chosen?" Every principal answered the question in a similar manner. The principals in this central Florida County have little to no input on the selection of the reading curriculum for their schools. Every elementary school must use the Harcourt Trophies (www.harcourtschool.com) Reading Series mandated by the school district.

According to the principals in the study, teachers were selected from various schools across the county in conjunction with county officials to choose the district's reading curriculum. Principals seemed to not be concerned about this process because the teachers are the individuals instructing the students majority of the time.

Tina: "Teachers know what they want. Teachers have more of a hands-on by being in the classroom. The further you are out of the classroom, the further away you are from the needs of the children."

The principals in this study showed little concern for not assisting in choosing the county's curriculum, but they made every effort to understand the curriculum and provide the resources required for their teachers to relay to the content effectively and efficiently.

Usage of supplemental reading curriculums

Supplemental reading curriculums (Table 3 & Table 4) allowed the administrators the flexibility to provide the resources to strengthen teachers' approaches for struggling readers, further accelerate average readers, and enhance above average readers. Supplemental reading programs also provide extended reading development that is designed to assist in increasing students' scores on the FCAT (www.fldoe.org). This use of supplemental reading materials comes in the form of computer labs, reading and writing strategies, and other curriculums. In the four Reading First schools, the supplemental programs are expected to provide additional instruction in the areas of phonics, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary (Sopko, 2002). Supplemental programs should be used in conjunction with a core comprehensive program such as the Harcourt Trophies (harcourtschool.com) curriculum currently being utilized by the county.

Tina: "The Compass Learning Lab is designed to help students on an individual basis with increasing their reading levels."

Fran: "Our school uses the Culyer Reading Strategies to teach students how to read and to improve their achievement on standardized reading tests."

Betty: "Our main reading curriculum is the Harcourt Trophies (www.harcourtschool.com) adopted by the county, but we also utilize Accelerated Reader and the Compass Lab. The Compass Lab is to help our students increase their reading achievement."

Elaine: "We use SRA for ESE students; Sing, Spell, Read, and Write for our first grade students; and the Leap Frog Program.

Vivian: "In our school we have the Star and AR programs, SRA, and I encourage teachers to bring in other things to help supplement the reading programs. Many times teachers have activities that have worked for them in the past with reading achievement, and I support them when they incorporate it into their instruction."

Supplemental reading programs are necessary components. They provide additional attention to students and their reading deficiencies. The principals in this study chose the supplemental programs based upon their students' needs, faculty recommendation, and their own personal observations.

Reading as a means of communication

Three of the eight principals viewed reading as a means of communication. Tina, Fran and Carey view communication as important for students to prosper and excel in the world of academia. Not only is communication relevant in school, it is relevant in their lives outside of the school setting. Communicating effectively is a real life challenge. Communicating allows students the opportunity to convey their messages verbally and in a written manner. Communicating also allows them to understand what is being communicated through written text.

Tina: "Reading is not just the reading of words."

Fran: "Reading is a way out of poverty. It's a way of communicating."

Carey: "Reading is the foundation of everything. Everything that we do is hinged on reading."

Reading as a means of communication was a theme that the principals introduced due to the importance of reading in society. From their personal experience, they know that if students want to establish and conquer their goals in life, they must be able to communicate effectively and efficiently.

Modeling

Modeling allows students to view others while they read or interact with reading materials. More specifically, modeling is a teaching strategy where the teacher thinks out loud and demonstrates strategies. Each principal in the study mentioned the importance of modeling for students. By modeling, students are able to receive a positive experience and interaction with reading. All participants in the study participated in modeling to assist students in appreciating reading.

According to the principals in the study, modeling occurred through various activities in the school. Principal Fran and Principal Vivian stated they often visit the classrooms to read to students and vice versa. In addition, several of the schools utilize the last thirty minutes of school to allow everyone in the school time to read silently. This includes every administrator, teacher, secretary, and all students. This practice let's students know that reading is a priority to everyone in their school.

Principal Elaine modeled by talking about reading with the students in class and during assemblies, having special announcements during the morning and afternoon announcements, and inviting guests to read for the students.

In general, modeling provides students with the opportunity to view and interact with their teachers, administrators, others in their lives within in the context of reading. Modeling gives students an example to follow and hopefully develop an appreciation for reading.

Acquisition and application of knowledge

The principals in the study realize that reading is more than just the calling of words. For reading to be meaningful, students must acquire knowledge and then apply the knowledge they gained. Students will only be successful in reading once they are able to accomplish this task.

Betty: "A person can learn a lot from reading."

Sue: "Read to gain knowledge."

Carey: "The understanding of printed text."

Elaine: "The ability of a person to decipher and comprehend the written word. Put it into meaningful form where they can understand what is being related to them."

Sarah: "The acquisition of knowledge and the application of it. Not just the reading to receive knowledge, but the ability to apply the knowledge."

The acquisition and application of knowledge is a relevant skill for children to be successful in their school academics, but also the state mandated tests that

are required of them. Students must move beyond just being able to read words. They must also be able to apply and utilize the information in the written text.

General concern for all children

The principals in this study showed a concern for all children regardless of their ethnicity and believed that all children should be given the opportunity to engage in positive reading experiences. But several concerns with African American children were introduced.   Tina, Fran, Betty, Carey, and Sarah mentioned the struggles many African American students encounter while in elementary school. Sometimes they lack the necessary foundation and motivation needed to be successful in reading and in school. This lack of foundation and motivation often delays the African American students' academic progress until they have caught up with their peers, which in turn may influence their achievement on standardized tests.

Sue: "There's a lack of parental encouragement to read at home. Research shows, that the more you read the better your reader will become. Practice makes perfect."

Vivian: "If the child does not hold a love and appreciation, thirst and desire to know more, when that same child sits for a standardized test and is presented with a passage to read that he or she perceives to be "too long", they do not attempt to read the passage or attempt to answer the questions without reading the passage first. These same children, when introduced to a reading assignment in the classroom, will groan and count the pages to see how much reading they are being required to

complete. While on the other hand, the child who has this love and respect

for learning and gaining knowledge through reading can hardly wait until

the teacher stops talking and allows them to read. I was like that in school.

I read everything and everywhere."

One principal discussed from her experiences that many African American

children dislike reading because it is more visual. They can relate to activities

that are more hands-on and less visual. In this instance it is relevant for teachers

to incorporate different learning strategies that will enable all students to learn.

Fran: "Students are starting school with zero skills, which makes them

start behind."

Vivian: "Perhaps reading is not modeled for them at an early,

impressionable age."

Sarah: "With African American children there is a challenge to foster a

love for reading. African American kids are hands-on learners instead of

visual learners. It is important to motivate African American children to

love to read. Educators should be able to take information and give it

back to them in a way that will provide knowledge and make it applicable

to them."

African American students should feel included in their school's

curriculum. This inclusion will help them feel comfortable within their school.

Carey: "It is important for students to see people that reflect themselves.

It is important that minorities see other minorities in the books they read at

school. This makes them feel a sense of pride. Hopefully this will encourage them to want to read."

Several principals discussed African American children and reading in a predominately white society. The discussion included, but was not limited to standardized tests, fairness in the system, and the push to excel academically from home and from school.

Sue: "I believe that all children can learn if given the instruction and opportunity to learn. I don't think race should be a factor. Teach all children, no exceptions."

Fran: "Give all children the opportunity to learn to read."

Vivian: "I sincerely believe that in education, as is in love and war, everything is fair. In the era in which I came of age, education in the African American community was held in high esteem, every parent wanted their son or daughter to obtain as much education as possible. College was the buzzword in our home from the time that the first infant was born. My father vigorously encouraged all six of us to excel academically and obtain college degrees and we all did. We rose to the level of his expectations."

Regardless of their backgrounds, students should all be given the opportunity to positively interact with reading according to Principals Tina, Fran, and Carey. This can be accomplished by exposing students to different strategies and activities. The principals realized that what works for one student

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may not work for another. Therefore it is pertinent to incorporate and utilize

appropriate and applicable mechanisms to expose students to reading.

Tina: "It is important to expose students to written text as much as

possible."

Childhood readers/avid adult readers

Principals Tina, Fran, and Vivian discussed appreciating a love for reading

and literacy at an early age. Each mentioned telling stories or reading books to

learn information. They admitted that this initial start had an effect on how they

value reading as adults.

Tina: "I don't remember when I could not read. I mean, like you said, I

remember my parents not necessarily reading me a book, but telling me

stories. And we took turns telling stories. And when a book was there, we

just read. I don't remember ever struggling."

Fran: "I loved to read as a child."

The principals early initiation into reading influences their perception of

how reading is addressed in their schools and what mechanisms they feel are

necessary and applicable to the students in their schools.

Principals Betty, Elaine, Vivian, and Sarah called themselves avid readers.

They read for personal enjoyment and for professional advancement.

Professional advancement and growth includes becoming knowledgeable about

current reading trends and issues, and legislation involving education. Each of

the principal's offices has shelves lined with books on various topics.

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Betty: She reiterated, "You can learn a lot from reading, that's why I read. It allows me to operate in other peoples worlds."

Elaine: "I must be knowledgeable on a professional level because I must meet the necessary expectations of the state and county officials. A principal can not afford not to be knowledgeable."

Vivian: "I have an innate love for books. I also know that if a child can read, there's nothing else a child can't do."

Sarah: "Reading allows me to make more informed decisions when it comes to my school."

The perceptions that the principals hold influence how they exert their power over their school's reading programs. A person's beliefs and experiences often guide them in how they make decisions (Norte, 1999).

Vivian: "Reading receives top priority at my school."

The majority of the principals in this study were childhood readers and continued their love of reading as adults. This love of reading spurred the principals to make reading a priority to be valued by students, faculty, and fellow administrators.

Professional sharing

Several principals spoke highly of collaborating with other faculty to learn new methods for teaching reading. Fran, Betty, Carey, and Sarah spoke of utilizing their peers to acquire new information and apply it accordingly in their school's reading curriculum.

The administrators in the study supported reading and forwarding it to their faculty members. They also encourage their teachers to share information with fellow faculty members and the administrators. This professional sharing and collaboration allows the schools to remain aware of new research and strategies that may be beneficial.

Fran: "We have learning communities. We share things with each other. We read books and then pass them on. If it's a hot issue, a round table discussion will take place. We share many professional books and articles because many of the staff members are in graduate school. Among the books shared are *Schools that Work* (1993) by George Woods; *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice (1993b)* and *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1993a)* by Howard Gardner; *What's Worth Fighting For in Your School* (1996) by Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves; and one of my favorites, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2001) by Ruby Payne.   The learning communities are school-wide but the interaction is usually done at the grade level meetings. When I purchase professional materials I usually purchase enough to share with the staff."

Betty: "We often receive training through internal discussions and meetings. We have professional study groups, and modeling activities."

Administrators also discussed the relevancy of collaborating during team and faculty meetings. These opportunities allow the administrators and faculty to brainstorm and consider the needs of the children. In addition, it provides

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support for those who are feeling overwhelmed with reading instruction and need the positive input of their peers on how to improve their instructional delivery and organization.

Build background knowledge

The last theme to be discussed is the building of background knowledge. Five out of the eight principals in the study discussed the relevancy of giving students a purpose for their reading, and ensuring the necessary background knowledge is built for students to comprehend the information presented to them while in class.

> Carey: "As adults we kind of figure out things when we choose material, but when we give students material to read, we need to make sure that they understand the purpose; that they have a background before reading so that understanding is easier for them to have. Many times we give them reading material and they have no concept of what you're talking about and then we wonder why they don't understand. They don't understand because they don't have the background that's needed to appreciate the material they have."

> Sarah: "One component of a successful reading program is building background knowledge for students."

The building of background knowledge is often confusing for some educators. According to the principals in this study, the building of background knowledge is important if students are to relate to their reading activities. In the

principals' opinions, teachers are responsible for providing additional material to assist students in understanding stories, or comprehension passages.

New Questions and Answers

As the results of the study emerged, I struggled with the redundancy of the original questions. To avoid being redundant, and to provide a thorough application of the research, new questions were formed:

- What are the perceived experiences of African American principals regarding reading instruction in the elementary schools?

- How does prior experience with reading, both personally and as a teacher/administrator, influence African American principals' perceived leadership of reading instruction in their schools?

- What principal initiated methods or approaches are used to assist students with reading achievement on standardized tests?

My rationale for adjusting the research questions is based upon the research methodology employed by the study from its conception. This collective case study leading to grounded theory began with general research questions used to guide the data collection and analysis. As the results emerged, I felt the need to alter the questions to specifically grasp the perceptions of the African American elementary principals. Strauss and Corbin (1994) discuss that grounded theory allows a connection to develop among the different perspectives through patterns and process of action/interaction that in turn are associated with specific conditions and consequences. Simply put, my questions began as a general guide for data collection and analysis and diverted to more direct questions to

eliminate redundancy, and bring to light the experiences of the eight African American principals.

What are the perceived experiences of African American principals regarding reading instruction in the elementary schools?

The principals in the study had varied experiences with reading instruction. Principals Tina, Fran, Sue, and Carey had experience with reading on the elementary level, while Betty, Elaine, Vivian and Sarah had reading instruction experience on the secondary level.

The principals with experience on the elementary level had somewhat different experiences with reading instruction. Tina taught reading as a teacher of second, fourth, and fifth grades on the elementary level, while Fran taught reading for sixteen years.

During her sixteen-year tenure, Fran pushed students to realize reading is important to survive in society. "Without reading you're not going to be able to do anything else. Unlike Fran and Tina, Sue pursued a certification in reading. Her master's degree in curriculum and instruction enabled her to learn various concepts, strategies, and theories. She made an effort to apply the knowledge she gained from textbooks applicable to her classroom and its students. As an elementary teacher, she taught grades second and fourth. Carey, on the other hand, felt she was more prepared to enter the classroom to teach reading due to her concentration in reading instruction during her first master's degree. In addition to coursework at the graduate level, Carey spoke highly of her in-

service opportunities she has engaged in that assisted in broadening her knowledge base of reading instruction.

Principals Betty, Elaine, Vivian, and Sarah had a varying perception of reading instruction due to their teaching experiences in the secondary content areas. Betty taught English on the secondary level and had multiple experiences with reading.

Elaine had experience in the social studies content area. This is an area that many children tend to struggle with due to lack of reading comprehension skills (Beck & McKeown, 1991; Schoenbach, Braunger, Elaineleaf & Litman, 2003). In addition, the standardized tests, such as the FCAT (www.fldoe.org), has reading passages consisting of social studies content.

> Elaine: "When I was in middle school, one of the things that we always complained about is that fact that the kids were not good readers. And it was very difficult to teach them math, science or social studies because students couldn't read the text. And that was especially true with social studies because if you can't read the material then you have to find other ways to get it across because they don't have any idea."

Due to the struggle students were having with reading in the social studies content, Elaine had to continuously initiate and incorporate methods to assist students in comprehending the text by utilizing supplementary material. She utilized strategies and concepts such as incorporating literature, using word maps, guided reading activities, and cloze passages (Allington & Cunningham, 1999; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2002; Graves & Graves, 2003; Schoenbach,

Braunger, Elaineleaf & Litman, 2003) that students were able to apply in her classroom, and in other content area classrooms as well.

Vivian holds a bachelor's degree in English Education. Her teaching experience includes, but is not limited to, teaching high school English, middle school language arts, drama and speech. While teaching English courses, reading was a focal point due to the comprehension and application of material. In agreement with the county's curriculum, she required students to read novels and plays to increase the knowledge of various genres of literature. In addition to teaching high school English, language arts, speech and drama, Vivian was previously the director of an early childhood learning center that focused on early literacy development.

Principal Sarah has a unique background in terms of her reading experiences. Prior to becoming a teacher, she worked for a television network assisting in the production of television shows. Her teaching experience includes teaching journalism, television production and language arts. While teaching language arts she utilized different reading activities and strategies to make reading fun and motivating for students.

The principals in this study came to their principal positions with varying experiences and perceptions of reading instruction. It is these perceptions that make their school's reading program unique and personable. Their experience influences the power of how their reading program operates.

How does prior experience with reading, both personally and as a teacher/administrator, influence African American principals' perceived leadership of reading instruction in their schools?

Principals in the study stressed the importance of making reading a priority in their schools and in their students' lives. They want all children to be successful, but it goes beyond that. Each of the principals in the study mentioned of reading being a lifeline, a way out of poverty, a way to communicate, and a way to ensure success in life.

Tina: "Reading is life, it's like blood."

Fran: "Reading is a way out of poverty. It's a way of communicating. It's a way of understanding many other world issues."

Sue: "If you can't read, you can't do anything."

Vivian: "If a child can read, there's nothing else a child can't do."

The struggles that the principals have seen as teachers and administrators enable the principals to make a connection with their students. They take into account their personal life when they are addressing reading and other academics. Often the students come to school with the bare necessities and little, if any, parental involvement, thus prompting principals to engage and assist their students in other ways to promote and motivate them to read and be successful.

Fran: "Teachers and administrators do most of the teaching due to low parental support."

Elaine: "We have little parental involvement, but that's because many of the parents are working and trying to make a living."

Vivian: "We create comfortable places for our students to read and use their imaginations. If we as adults like to be comfortable when we read, why shouldn't students be the same way."

This promotion and motivation sometimes comes in the way of awards, but sometimes it occurs by instilling a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Betty: "We make reading a priority by giving awards, having author talks, and character days."

Sue: "We have nine week celebrations to award positive reading gains and goals.

Carey: "Our school normally gives trophies to students that have met their reading goals."

Elaine: "Our school promotes (reading) through talks, announcements, and modeling how everyone reads."

On a personal level, several principals discussed being childhood readers and avid adult readers. This innate appreciation for reading influenced their perception of reading and its importance in schools today. Vivian states it best when she discusses her personal history with reading and how it affects the way reading is taught in her school.

Vivian: "I was and still am an avid reader. I chose English Education as a major in college because of my love and appreciation for the written expression in any form. Reading receives top priority at my school, it is

taught based on scientifically based research and personal trial and error

methods, and any "Best Practices" that are shared by other colleagues."

Principal Sue concurs with Vivian, "Reading is strongly emphasized."

What principal-initiated methods or approaches are used to assist students

with reading achievement on standardized tests?

The prominent ways students are assisted is through the use of

supplementary reading programs and tutoring. The two components forge a

relationship that allows the opportunity for students to be successful in

academics and reading achievement on standardized tests.

Supplementary reading programs are those used in addition to the district

mandated reading series, Harcourt Trophies (www.harcourtschool.com). The

principals have the opportunity to have their voices heard in terms of selecting

supplementary reading programs. Often they collaborate with their teachers to

make appropriate and beneficial selections based on their students' needs.

Programs such as AR (www.renalearn.com); the Compass Lab (http://www.polk-

fl.net/DrNERobertsEl/compass_computer_lab.htm); Culyer Strategies (Newman,

2002); Leap Frog (www.leapfrog.com); and Sing, Spell, Read, and Write

(www.singspell.com) are examples (see Table 4, p. 112) that are utilized and

incorporated in the school's to engage and promote the achievement of the

students.

Tutoring occurs before school, during school, and/or after school at all of

the schools in the study. The tutoring allows for students to receive

individualized attention without the pressure they may receive in a whole group

setting. Tutors are often teachers, parents, and interested members of the community that want students to succeed. Sometimes tutors have students read to and with them to increase fluency. In addition, the activities that were introduced during the reading block are reviewed for clarity during the tutoring sessions.

The supplemental programs are used in class, and during tutoring sessions. According to the principals, the extra reading programs and tutoring assists in the development of conscious and knowledgeable readers that can apply what they've learned to different situations. Often this transfer of knowledge enables students to be versatile and successful in reading.

Summary of Research Results

This collective case study examined the perceptions of eight African American women in the area of reading curriculum and instruction in a central Florida county. The major purpose for conducting the study was to discover and present these perceptions of African American elementary principals in the context of reading curriculum and instruction.

The themes in the study were categorized into two categories, public requirements and personal perceptions. The themes that emerged throughout the study that were categorized into public requirements were FCAT (www.fldoe.org), NCLB (2001), usage of supplemental reading curriculums, and county reading curriculum.   The themes in personal perceptions were reading as a means of communication, modeling, acquisition and application of knowledge, general concern for all children, childhood readers/avid adult readers,

professional sharing, and building of background knowledge.   These themes

emerged as a result of interviews, field notes, and a research reflection journal.

As the principals participated in the study, they expressed an appreciation for

being interviewed and assisting the world of academia in becoming

knowledgeable about the perceptions of African American elementary principals.

Table 1
Principals' Demographics

Principal	Age Range	Colleges Attended	Levels of Education	Years in Education	Years as an administrator (Including AP years)	School's Student Demographics
Tina	41-50	USF Nova	BS, MEd	17	6	White 50% AA 48% Hispanic 2%
Fran	51-60	BCC USF	BS, MEd	26	20	White 51% AA 12% Hispanic 37%
Betty	51-60	PCC USF Nova	BS, MEd, EdD	33	23	White 60% AA 20% Hispanic 10% Asian 10%
Sue	51-60	Knoxville College USF Nova	BS, MA, EdD	29	15	White 58% AA 28% Hispanic 13% Asian 1%
Carey	51-60	FAMU	BS, MS, MEd	29	14	White 70% AA 20% Hispanic 10%
Elaine	51-60	BCC UCLA	BA, MS	30	10	White 60% AA 22% Hispanic 18%
Vivian	51-60	USF Nova	BA MEd	31	5	White 59.8% AA 19.6% Hispanic 18.5% PI 3%
Sarah	31-40	UNC-Chapel Hill USF	BA, MEd	10	3	White 67% AA 17% Hispanic 11%

Appendix E contains abbreviations for Table One

Table 2

Emerging Themes from Principal Interviews

Themes	Tina	Fran	Betty	Sue	Carey	Elaine	Vivian	Sarah	Categories
FCAT (www.fldoe.org)	X					X	X	X	Public requirements
NCLB (2001)	X	X	X	X					Public requirements
Usage of supplemental reading curriculums	X	X	X	X	X	X			Public requirements
County reading curriculum	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Public requirements
Reading as a means of communication	X	X			X				Personal perception
Modeling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Personal perception
Acquisition and application of knowledge			X	X	X	X		X	Personal perception
General concern for all children	X	X	X		X			X	Personal perception
Childhood readers/avid adult readers	X	X	X			X	X	X	Personal perception
Professional sharing		X	X		X			X	Personal perception
Build background knowledge		X	X	X	X			X	Personal perception

Table 3

Supplemental Reading Program Table

Principal	Mandatory Reading Program	Supplemental Reading Programs	Systematic	Title I School	Reading First School
Tina	Harcourt Trophies	Sing, Spell, Read & Write Leap Frog	Yes No	Yes	
Fran	Harcourt Trophies	Culyer Reading Strategies AR Star	No No No	Yes	
Betty	Harcourt Trophies	AR Star Compass Lab	No No No	Yes	X
Sue	Harcourt Trophies	AR Star Compass Lab	No No No	Yes	X
Carey	Harcourt Trophies	Culyer Reading Strategies AR Star Compass Lab	No No No No	Yes	
Elaine	Harcourt Trophies	SRA Sing, Spell, Read & Write AR Star Leap Frog	Yes Yes No No No	Yes	X
Vivian	Harcourt Trophies	AR Star Compass Lab	No No No	Yes	X
Sarah	Harcourt Trophies	AR Star SRA	No No Yes	No	

Table 4

Description and Purpose of Supplemental Reading Programs

Supplemental Program	Purpose of Program
Culyer Reading Strategies	A program introduced by Richard and Gail Culyer that works to increase the reading comprehension levels of students (Newman, 2002)
SRA	The program utilizes multisensory instruction. It uses an integrated language approach that uses listening, writing, reading, and language arts skills. The program incorporates various components to prevent phonics from being the only skill taught to students (www.sraonline.com).
Compass Lab	A computerized program used to track student success in reading and math in compliance with the Sunshine State Standards.
Leap Frog	Hands-on learning systems designed to positively engage children in learning. The programs are designed based on current research (www.leapfrog.com)
Sing, Spell, Read & Write	The program incorporates sequenced systematic, explicit phonics instructional strategies to build fluent, independent readers. The program is designed to integrate current research on brain function, language acquisition, and reading to efficiently and effectively reach various types of learners (singspell.com). The program is designed to support the five components of the Reading First (www.ed.gov) initiative.
Accelerated Reader (AR)	A tracking system used to aid students in becoming more efficient readers by testing their knowledge of books they have read. Students complete a quiz by computer based on the book and receive a numerical score (www.renlearn.com).
Star	A reading assessment computer program used to determine a student's reading level (www.renlearn.com).

Chapter V

Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of African American elementary principals in regards to reading curriculum and instruction. In addition, the study attempted to address attitudes and beliefs in the context of reading curriculum and instruction in the elementary school. The first portion of the chapter provides a review of the procedures and the questions that guided the study. The rest of the chapter is organized to allow for discussion of the significant issues that emerged as a result of the collective case study (Stake, 2000): culturally relevant leadership, reading is more than just reading, socio-cultural perception of reading, collaboration, professional development, systematic knowledge of reading, limitations, the significance of the study within today's educational settings, and recommendations for further research.

The study was designed to be qualitative. It was a collective case study leading to grounded theory (Stake, 2000). The study utilized semi-structured interviews, field notes, and a researcher reflection journal as data sources. The data sources were analyzed separately on an on-going basis and then combined to allow the researcher the full view of the participants' perceptions and experiences as they discussed reading curriculum and instruction.

The initial research questions that guided this qualitative study were:

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- What are the perceived relationships among African American elementary principals, their perceived linguistic experiences, and their perceptions of school literacy?

- What are the perceived experiences of African American principals regarding reading instruction in the elementary schools?

- Based on experience as a teacher and an administrator, how do African American principals perceive reading to be addressed in their schools?

- How does prior experience with reading influence African American principals' perceptions of their leadership of reading instruction in their schools?

- What principal-initiated methods or approaches are used to assist students with reading achievement on standardized tests?

The research questions that emerged as a result of repeated data analysis were:

- What are the perceived experiences of African American principals regarding reading instruction in the elementary schools?

- How does prior experience with reading, both personally and as a teacher/administrator, influence African American principals' perceived leadership of reading instruction in their schools?

- What principal initiated methods or approaches are used to assist students with reading achievement on standardized tests?

The new questions eliminated redundancy in the research findings and enabled the researcher to focus on the pertinent issues relevant to the African American elementary principals and their perceptions of reading curriculum and instruction.

Culturally Relevant Leadership

Culturally relevant leadership is a newly developed term that encompasses power, perception, knowledge, and lastly social and cultural influences. The principals made an effort to optimize the power they have in their schools by effectively utilizing their perception. Their perception is enhanced through acquired knowledge relating to their field of expertise, personal and professional experiences, and personal beliefs. These characteristics assist in the development of a culturally relevant leader. The elementary principals in this study prided themselves on remaining aware of their personal culture and heritage, as well as the culture and heritage of their students, faculty, and the surrounding communities in which they serve. This awareness and appreciation may lead to the principals providing quality leadership that encourages all students to excel.

In terms of this study, culturally relevant leadership allowed for African American principals to provide effective and productive leadership in an institution that is predominately controlled by white males. True culturally relevant leaders are able to code-switch and utilize their power and perception to make learning beneficial for their students. They are able to look beyond the immediate and look towards the future by implementing programs and procedures that will provide additional support for their students. The principals

in this study made a conscious effort to implement supplemental reading programs, tutoring opportunities, and other educational mechanisms in an attempt to further progress the academic achievement of their students.

Much like culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994), culturally relevant leadership seeks to empower students and teachers through intellectual, social, and emotional, and political means that will aid in acquiring additional knowledge, skills and abilities. This empowerment creates an overall positive school learning environment that is beneficial for students and the teachers.

One theme that emerged as a result of the study that related to culturally relevant leadership was the general concern for all children. Five out of eight principals discussed the importance of all children receiving an equal and appropriate education. The principals further expressed the notion that all children can learn, but the method in which they are taught that's relevant.

Culturally relevant leaders are knowledgeable about issues occurring in their field. The leaders remain aware of current research and mandates that may influence their school and its students. They insure that their teachers are prepared to instruct their students by encouraging and sometimes requiring them to attend professional development opportunities that will increase their personal and professional knowledge, overall academic achievement of students, and the students achievement on standardized tests.

In addition to gaining knowledge via professional development, culturally relevant leaders provide opportunities for their staff to collaborate and share on a professional level.

Culturally relevant leaders not only monitor what happens in their schools, but they seek to understand what occurs within the community in which their students' live.

Reading is More Than Just Reading

The majority of the principals in this study viewed reading as more than just the "process of constructing meaning from written texts" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 7). Galda, Cullinan, and Strickland (1993) defined reading as the "transacting with the text to create meaning; it is bringing meaning to a text in order to create meaning from it" (p. 124). The principals extended these meanings to incorporate reading as a way out of poverty, a way of communicating, a way to become successful in life. Reading was described to be more than the reading of words, but as a way prospering and succeeding in society. Six of the participants attended school during the time of integration. They were able to see the transition from segregation, to the new world of integration. They came from a time when education was highly respected and valued in the African American community (Edwards, 1999; hooks, 1995; McCullough-Garrett, 1993). From the interviews, it was gathered that many of the principals were pushed to excel academically by their parents. Two participants in particular spoke of how they read with their parents and how their parents pushed them to excel in school in efforts to encourage them to attend

college. Their parents had seen and experienced many of the struggles encountered by African Americans in terms of literacy, and made an effort to instill positive reading habits within their children, to prevent them from enduring many of the same obstacles they encountered. In addition, many of the participants' parents did not have college degrees and expected their children to achieve and accomplish more in comparison to what they had accumulated during their lifetimes.

One issue the study was concerned with was how principals' prior experiences with reading, both personally and as a teacher/administrator, influenced their leadership of reading instruction in their schools. The question led to several conclusions that aided in understanding how the principals' experiences influenced their leadership of reading instruction in their schools. According to Norte (1999), the beliefs, attitudes, and experiences individuals encounter influence how they lead their organization. This is also applicable to the principals in this collective case study. They discussed their personal and professional experiences in regards to reading instruction and how these lead to their current perceptions.

A majority of the principals in the study considered themselves to be avid readers, whether during their childhood or during adulthood, and viewed reading as a means of communication to survive in the world today. From their personal experiences as children and adults, they know that if children are not pushed to read and excel, they will be left behind, especially minority children who often lack a strong foundation or exposure to reading prior to beginning school (Baker

& Wigfield, 1999; Campbell-Whatley & Comer, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Steele, 1992; Washington & Craig, 2001). This is one of the primary reasons the principals in this study made and continue to make reading a priority in their schools. The participants expressed a desire to give all children the opportunity to have positive interactions with reading and quality reading instruction. They attempted to practice this when they were teachers and continued to stress it to fellow administrators and faculty members. These personal and professional experiences discussed in the interviews assisted the principals in setting goals and expectations, which are important for any reading program to be successful (Lomotey, 1989; Murphy, 2004).

According to the principals in this study, reading was valued during their childhood and it extended beyond the ability of just being able to read. This runs counter to what they are witnessing among their population of minority children in their schools. Reading was more than just an educational instrument; it was and still is a social and cultural device as well for the principals in this study. The principals reported that there are other factors that need to be considered when a child is learning to read, and these other factors should be taken into account if children are to prosper academically and on standardized reading tests. They know what challenges African American's are faced with in society and that they must read to operate in other's worlds; they must read because it is a survivor tool and technique; and they must read to have any opportunity to prosper. As one participant so forcefully stated, "reading is life; it's like blood." It must be remembered that blood flows throughout the body, not just in one particular area.

And if reading is like blood, it goes beyond the school environment. It encompasses other areas such as; culture, nutrition, family, language, and economic status that enable reading for children to be a success or a failure (Scott-Jones, 1995).

Sociocultural Perception of Reading

The definitions of reading introduced by the principals in this study were expanded beyond the ability to call words and comprehend. Some principals took the meaning of reading and transferred it into a socio-cultural perspective. A sociocultural view of literacy requires individuals to view reading, not just as the act of reading, but should take into account the learners' experiences, shared experiences with others, and their cultural experiences (Gee, 2000). "A sociocultural understanding of learning and development focuses on the cultural resources that mediate an individual's participation and engagement in social practice" (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003, p. 39). Viewing reading through a sociocultural lens allowed principals to understand how children read, and how to improve reading for the students in their particular schools (Razfar & Guiterrez, 2003; Torres-Velasquez, 2000). The principals reported that they utilized reading in multiple contexts, audiences, and purposes depending on the situation (Lu, 1998), thus extending it beyond a textbook definition of reading in the educational setting.

The principals in this study viewed reading as more than what happens inside of the normal school setting and took into account other social, environmental, and cultural factors that may influence reading and reading

acquisition (Espinosa & Burns, 2003; Galda, Cullinan & Strickland, 1993; Rothstein, 1991). From their perception, if students are to acquire the necessary achievement on standardized reading tests, school and social factors must be taken into account to effectively access their reading development (Griffith, 2002; Pershey, 2003; Torres-Velasquez, 2000; Viadero, 2003). According to Razfar and Gutierrez (2003), it is difficult to address literacy without including other factors such as, culture, history, and values. The outside forces sometimes have an effect upon how children learn to read and their achievement on standardized reading tests (Pershey, 2003). "A student's development cannot be understood by a study of the individual; we must also examine the external social world in which that individual's life developed" (Jaramillo, 1996, p. 136).   One such force is poverty (Allington, 2002; Au, 2000; Corley, 2003; Espinosa & Burns, 2003). Several principals viewed reading as a way out of poverty. According to Scott-Jones (1995), "poverty is a status variable that is consistently associated with low educational achievement and low educational attainment" (p. 107). Children in poverty are less likely to have access to reading materials at an early age, which may cause them to be delayed when they start school, thus possibly affecting their reading achievement (Allington, 2002; Espinosa & Burns, 2003; Pressley, Dolezal, Roehrig & Hilden, 2002).

Another factor that may influence reading and reading acquisition is the family and environment of the children. Children's earliest experience with literacy is in the home interacting with parents, siblings, and extended family members (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985; Espinosa & Burns, 2003;

Morrow, 1993). "Reading begins in the home, children acquire knowledge

before coming to school that lays the foundation for reading. They acquire

concepts for understanding things, events, thoughts, and feelings, and the oral

language vocabulary for expressing these concepts" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott &

Wilkinson, 1985, p. 21). This socialization allows children to be introduced into

language learning, and early reading skills (Booth & Rowsell, 2002; Pressley,

Dolezal, Roehrig & Hilden, 2002).

The child's culture plays a role in reading development as well (Espinosa

& Burns, 2003). Students should have the opportunity to see their culture

reflected in their reading curriculum and their teacher's instruction (Au, 2000;

Booth & Rowsell, 2002). Several principals discussed the relevancy of students

being able to identify with what is being read in class. The principals' statements

parallel the conclusions of Gordon and Thomas (1990) who discussed that

students should be able to access their own cultural currencies as vehicles for

learning. Harchar and Hyle (1996) conducted a study with principals and

discovered that the administrators recognized that children learn much of what

they know outside of school and not from their classroom teacher. The

administrators went further to discuss that the outside knowledge should be

recognized, appreciated, and used. In this study, many of the principals

attempted to utilize their students' home environment with their school

environment by incorporating activities that included their parents and siblings.

Several of the principals held literacy and computer nights for the parents and

students to attend together as a means of encouraging parent and student

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involvement in learning. Parents were also invited to visit the school and share books with their child's class. The principals also included activities in the school that focused on the various cultures of their students.

The outside elements that effect children's lives cannot be ignored. The principals in this study appeared to encompass children's home and school environments to assist in understanding the most appropriate method to help them in being successful academically and on standardized reading tests. The collaboration that existed between administrators and teachers was relevant. This collaboration allowed administrators and teachers to discover the best methods to promote achievement, while accounting for social, economic, and cultural factors.

Collaboration

Collaboration was defined in chapter two as the social discourse among teachers and administrators in a learning community that enables them to see multiple perspectives and communicate effectively and efficiently (Gutherie & Wigfield, 2000). Many of the principals in the study spoke of engaging in learning communities within their schools that allowed them to collaborate with their faculty. They spoke of having grade level meetings, leadership teams, literacy teams, and program meetings as a way to establish goals and priorities for the students' learning and the overall school (Booth & Rowsell, 2002). The meetings allowed the administrators, teachers, and other faculty members to communicate and discuss issues relevant to reading achievement (Booth & Rowsell, 2002; Murphy, 2004). Similar to the study by Blasé and Blasé (1999) that discussed

successful schools allow their administrators and faculty to collaborate, the principals in the study strived to provide opportunities for professional collaboration through discussions, study groups, and observations. According to Bottoms (2001), "successful principals lead teams composed of assistant principals, team leaders, department heads, and others who share a common point of view on raising student achievement. The principal should focus the staff on the important things: teaching challenging content, engaging students in learning and constantly seeking ways to raise achievement" (p. 4). In this study, the principals made it a priority to collaborate with their faculty and other staff members to develop a successful reading program.

On a professional level, the principals in the study constantly looked for opportunities to increase their students' overall academic achievement and their achievement on standardized test, thus making it necessary for principals to collaborate professionally with faculty members, district representatives, parents, and students (Harchar & Hyle, 1996). According to Heck, Larson, and Marcoulides (1990), this type of collaboration that occurred with the participants in this study is needed for their schools to be high reading achieving schools.

Professional sharing with faculty members was an important issue with the principals in the study. Five out of the eight principals discussed the importance of remaining aware of current reading research, and how it was accomplished as a school in general. In addition, Papalewis and Fortune (2002) conducted a study that supported leadership teams collaborating weekly to ensure they were working towards the school goals and to share best practices. According to

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Bottoms (2001), administrators should create learning communities to allow

teachers the opportunity to collaborate. This collaboration of core academic

subjects and elective teachers is a practical way for teachers to connect and

develop effective teaching practices and methods to assist students. Several

principals in the study spoke of utilizing learning communities as a method of

relaying information to other teachers in the school. This often occurred during

the grade level meetings.

Collaboration appeared to be important to the principals in this study. The

committees and teams established in the schools exhibit an effort to make

reading a priority.

Professional Development

Some of the participants' experiences with reading instruction involved

attending professional development courses. The principals supported teachers

and fellow administrators attendance at professional development courses

because it enabled them to better serve the students academic and achievement

needs in reading (Afflerbach, 2000; Harchar & Hyle, 1996; Murphy, 2004;

Wohlstetter & Malloy, 2001). In addition, Booth and Rowsell (2002) discussed

the importance of principals to be seekers and gathers of knowledge as a means

to model the importance of attending professional development. According to a

study conducted by Papalewis and Fortune (2002), continuous staff development

allowed the administrators and teachers to remain aware and assisted in meeting

the new challenges that confronted their schools. While Bottoms (2001), stated

that effective leaders provide opportunities for their staff members to strengthen

their academic knowledge while learning new research-based and student-centered instructional strategies. "Popular "sit and get," "hit and run," and "spray and pray" training sessions must be replaced with effective research-based practices for professional development which include factors such as support, feedback, duration, planning, and teacher reflection" (Swan, 2003, p. 248)

The principals mentioned that professional development occurred in numerous ways within and outside of the school setting: Active participation in state and national conferences; graduate coursework; district level trainings; on-site trainings with administrators and/or teachers; and learning communities (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). Depending on the school and their level of funding, they received additional reading instructional training through Title I www.ed.gov/programs/titleipara and the Reading First (www.ed.gov) initiative. According to Murphy (2004), principals that are effective ensure their teachers and administrators have the opportunity to attend professional development opportunities such as conferences as a means to extend their current content area knowledge.

Despite the popularity of professional development among the majority of the participants, one principal spoke about her staff not being overly excited or cooperative in terms of receiving professional development because they believed it was being forced on them by district and state mandates. These findings are similar to those in a study completed by Harchar and Hyle (1996) that discussed administrators' beliefs concerning mandates being a barrier to teachers. Some teachers in this study were unwilling to attend professional

development opportunities because the mandates set by the county and state prohibited them from teaching holistic learning methods. Many of the teachers in the school did not support some of the professional development because it was not relevant to them as educators or their students. However, they didn't find fault with the professional development that proved to be beneficial to the growth of the school or the students. These findings parallel Quinn's (2002) discussion about teachers supporting professional development as long as it is meaningful.

Professional development is an area that invokes mixed emotions among administrators and teachers. The most important component is professional development should be meaningful and provide a purpose for teachers and administrators. When staff members support professional development courses, they are more likely to process the gained knowledge, and incorporate the new knowledge into their classrooms to be disseminated to their students.

Systematic Knowledge of Reading Curriculum and Instruction

A majority of the principals in the study exhibited a systematic knowledge of reading curriculum and instruction. Especially when asked to define the components of a successful reading program. For the purposes of this discussion, I defined systematic knowledge of reading curriculum and instruction in layman's terms as a direct and intense phonics based instructional program (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985; Arrasmith, 2003; Cambourne, 2002; Cunningham, 2002; Garan, 2002; Paterson, 2002). "In it's most effective form, phonics instruction benefits most from direct teaching that is systematic, that is, it follows a predictable plan or curriculum" (www.indiana.edu/~reading/phonics).

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When describing the components of a successful reading program, majority of the principals mentioned phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies, which are the components of the NCLB (2001). In addition, many of the definitions of reading included being able to decode and decipher words.

Many of the programs the principals have in their schools relate to phonics. For example, Sing, Spell, Read & Write (www.singspell.com) was described on its website as being a "multi-sensory, phonics-based reading program that supports all five key components of reading instruction called for by the Reading First Initiative" (www.singspell.com). This particular program was used with first graders in some schools but can also be used in Pre-K and Kindergarten grades.

Across the nation there is a trend that exhibits a strong emphasis in the Reading First initiative. Many schools show similarity in core reading programs, professional development, and assessments (Manzo, 2004). This trend may also have an influence as to how principals direct the reading programs in their schools. The approaches principals are now being pressured to incorporate in their schools are known for being grounded in scientific research (Manzo, 2004; www.fcrr.org/FCRReports). "Scientifically based reading research is research that applies rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties" (www.fcrr.org/FCRReports). The reading program being used in this Central Florida County is considered to be one of the five core reading programs

that meet the Reading First's criteria for research based materials (Manzo, 2004) and is systematic.

This systematic knowledge of reading curriculum and instruction that emerged from the data collection may have occurred for several reasons: the continuous professional development being received by the administrators and faculty; and/or the prior professional and personal experiences of the administrators.   A portion of the systematic knowledge from my perception is based on the continuous training the principals received related to the Reading First (www.ed.gov) initiative. They have training on the initiative, they are asked to explain the initative to the parents, they have flyers on their desks promoting the initiative, and they have numerous meetings with their faculty, county and state officials. This constant interaction with systematic instruction may influence a principal's beliefs and attitudes. There may be a misalignment between what principals actually believe and what their job requires them to implement and support.

Another portion of the systematic knowledge may exist from the principals' prior professional experience as teachers, but also their personal educational experience as it relates to reading. Six of the principals were educated during the mid 1950s and 1960s. During this time, many schools still relied upon phonics to teach children how to read (Heilman, 1998; Moustafa, 1997). Their personal experience with phonics may have lead to their relying upon the method to teach their students how to read when they were teachers.

Systematic reading has proponents and opponents (Altwerger, Arya, Jin, Jordan, Laster, Martens, Wilson & Wiltz, 2004; Coles, 2000; Smith, 1999). Administrators have little to no voice concerning their reading curriculum in their schools. They are required to implement programs mandated by the county, state, and/or federal government. Despite this fact, the principals in this study appeared to make efforts to promote reading and reading achievement in their schools.

Summary of Issues

The previously discussed conclusions are relevant in understanding the perceptions of African American elementary principals, and principals in general. A study of this caliber added to the limited current research on elementary principals and reading curriculum and instruction, but more specifically, the study gave light to a specific population of elementary principals who are often overlooked. The results of this study gave insight about a group of individuals who appeared to be knowledgeable and had years of experience with a wealth of information just waiting to be unleashed and shared with the world of academia if only given the opportunity. An ERIC (www.ericfacility.net) search further supported the lack of current research on African American elementary principals in the context of reading curriculum and instruction. In addition, I contacted the National Association of Elementary Principals (NAESP) (www.naesp.org), which also stated there is no statistical data on African American elementary principals.

Despite having to utilize a European American dominated curriculum, the African American principals presented in this study were able to use the

curriculum to their advantage. They were able to "code-switch" between the traditional curriculum agendas and the specific needs of their young readers in efforts to promote success in academics and on standardized reading tests. Tina discussed in her interview that there is no perfect plan for every child, while Sarah concurred by stating what works for one school, may not work for others. These statements exhibited how principals realize they must adjust the curriculum and instruction that happens in their schools to suit their students and their needs.

Limitations

The major limitation within this collective case study is the represented sample size. Eight out of an eligible eleven African American elementary principals from this central Florida County participated in the study. Even though the participating sample provided adequate data, a larger replication study involving additional counties in the large, southeastern state, and/or samples from other states would yield more reliable results. Utilizing different geographical areas would allow other considerations, themes, and patterns to emerge.

A second limitation is the gender of the participants. All of the participants in this collective case study were women, thus giving the researcher a totally female perception of reading curriculum and instruction. A larger scale study increases the possibility of including male participants. Having male and female participants strengthens the study and incorporates additional validity and reliability.

The final limitation was the ages of the participants. Only two participants did not fall into the 51-60 age category. Tina was in the 41-50 range, while Sarah fell into the 31-40 category. By having additional individuals in the 31-40 and 41-50 age category, more information, perhaps from different perspectives could be gathered and synthesized. Once again, in a larger study, the ages would be varied, thus allowing the other age voices to be stronger.

Significance

Since the majority of learning revolves around reading and it happens during the elementary years, the perceptions of principals are an important issue to examine. What needs to be added is the perceptions of the African American principal because they have often been neglected, overlooked and/or encompassed in a study that discusses overall school effectiveness.

From my review for this study, there is limited current research on African American elementary principals in the context of reading curriculum and instruction. I have attempted to bring forward the perceptions and experiences of this group of principals and how they initiate academics and standardize reading achievement success in their schools.

The data portrayed that African American elementary principals' experiences, whether personal or professional, influence their perceptions of how they design and implement their reading program for their school. And this design is heavily influenced by education policy.

Recommendations for Further Research

Understanding African American elementary principals perceptions of reading curriculum and instruction in this age of accountability requires additional attention. A study of how novice principals develop successful reading programs in comparison to experienced principals is important for future educational research.

A longitudinal study of Principals Tina, Vivian, and Sarah may be warranted to discover if their perception alters with additional administrative experience. This study would allow a researcher to examine the changes that occur over time, and how and if these changes affect overall student academic success and achievement on standardized reading tests.

A final area in need of exploration is the literacy problems of African American children and the lack of African American elementary principal perceptions presented in research. This research would give insight on the struggling African American reader through the view of the African American principal.

The lack of current research on African American principals and other minority principals is disturbing. The constant changes in America's schools show that now is the time to gain multiple perceptions of reading instruction from various ethnicities. As an African American researcher and educator, it is even more pertinent for me to research African American children and educators to create an understanding of their world and give them a voice in the world of academia. If we as a society want students to achieve overall academic success

and achievement on standardized tests, we must explore the perceptions and experiences of individuals from different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds.

As researchers, we should step outside our comfort zones and explore other worlds foreign to our own even though it may cause us to be uncomfortable. As many of the principals in this study stated, "reading allows you to explore other peoples' worlds," it is our responsibility to inform the world of information not readily seen or examined.

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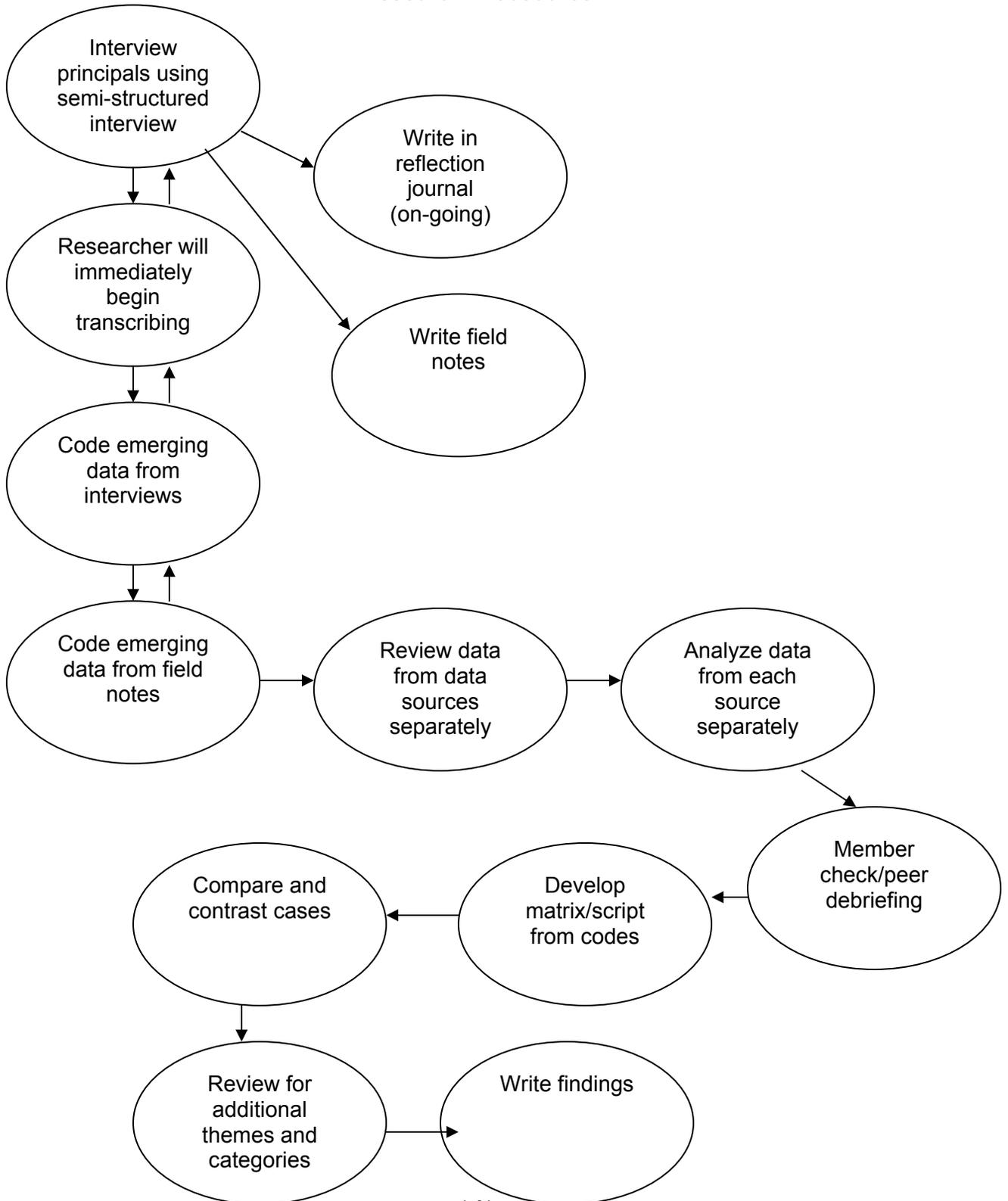*Principals (NASSP) Bulletin, 86, 3-17*.

Appendix A

Research Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Guide Questions	Collection Source
What are the perceived relationships between African American elementary principals, their perceived linguistic experiences, and their perceptions of school literacy?	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12	Interview
What are the perceived experiences of African American principals regarding reading instruction in the elementary schools?	5, 6, 8	Interview
Based on experience as a teacher and an administrator, how do African American principals perceive reading to be addressed in their schools?	5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 17	Interview Field notes
How does prior experience with reading influence African American principals' perception of their leadership of reading instruction in their schools?	4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	Interviews Field notes
What principal initiated methods are used to assist students with reading achievement on standardized tests?	8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17	Interviews Field notes

Appendix B

Research Procedures

Interview principals using semi-structured interview

Write in reflection journal (on-going)

Researcher will immediately begin transcribing

Write field notes

Code emerging data from interviews

Code emerging data from field notes

Review data from data sources separately

Analyze data from each source separately

Member check/peer debriefing

Compare and contrast cases

Develop matrix/script from codes

Review for additional themes and categories

Write findings

Appendix C

Elementary Principals' Interview Guide

1. Years in education:
   - 1-5   _____
   - 6-10 _____
   - 11-15 _____
   - 16-20 _____
   - 21-25 _____
   - 26 +   _____
   How many years as a teacher? _____
   How many years as an administrator? _____
2. Male _____   Female _____
3. Age:
   - 20 – 30 _____
   - 31 – 40 _____
   - 41 – 50 _____
   - 51 – 60 _____
   - 61 – 70 _____
   - 70+   _____
4. College (s) attended, degree (s) attained and year received:
5. Please describe your educational experience as it relates to reading instruction.
6. What is your personal definition of reading?
7. What is your role in your school's reading program?
8. What motivates you to promote reading in your school?
9. What specific reading programs are used in your school? (For example: AR, Reading Recovery, STAR, etc…)
10. In your opinion, what are the components of a successful reading program?
11. Do you feel principals who are knowledgeable about state reading standards and current reading research have more successful reading programs? Why or Why not?
12. How do administrators and teachers in your school receive professional development on current reading trends and issues?
13. How do you make reading a priority in your schools? (Special activities, tutoring, treats, etc…)
14. How does your school identify and assist struggling readers?
15. Please list the percentage of students for each group. _____ African American, _____ Hispanic, _____ Caucasian, _____ Asian, _____ Other
16. Please list the number of faculty in your school.
17. What is the student to teacher ratio in your reading classes for each grade level?

Appendix D

Research Reflection Journal Entry

Time: _____

Date: _____

Interview: _____ yes _____ no

Site Visit: _____ yes _____ no

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Appendix E

Abbreviations

USF   University of South Florida
Nova   Nova Southeastern University
BCC   Bethune Cookman College
PCC   Polk Community College
FAMU   Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
UNC   University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
UCLA   University of California at Los Angeles

BS   Bachelor of Science
BA   Bachelor of Arts
MS   Master of Science
M.Ed   Master of Education
EdD   Doctorate of Education
PhD   Doctorate of Philosophy

About the Author

Keva L. Mitchell received her dual Bachelor's of Science degrees in Criminology and Political Science from Florida State University. She also received her Master's of Science degree from Florida State University in Social Science Education. She has taught 7th grade Geography, 8th grade American History, and Language Arts and Social Studies in a multi-grade setting located in a juvenile justice detention center.

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