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## A Descriptive Study of the Factors that Prevent Principal Candidates from Advancement to the Principal Position

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A Descriptive Study of the Factors that Prevent Principal Candidates from Advancement  
to the Principal Position

by

Robyn R. Witcher

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my wonderful son Matthew whose faith, support, and love helped make this dream a reality. You are my inspiration.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This dissertation could not have been completed without the support and sacrifice of many people and my faith in God. I would first like to thank my son Matthew who is my source of strength and inspiration. He always believes I can accomplish the impossible and he makes me believe I can too. I thank my parents who instilled in me a passion for learning and being the best that I can. My deepest appreciation to my committee chair Dr. Greenlee, who provided encouragement, leadership, and expert advice. And to the other members of my committee, Dr. Bruner, Dr. Faucette and Dr. Young, thank you for your time, advice, and support. Finally, to the study participants, thank you for your time and the data you provided regarding this study.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study examined the perceived barriers to the principalship by prepared principal candidates as a means of understanding why some candidates are unsuccessful in acquiring a principalship. The use of a questionnaire, interviews, and reflection postcards served as the data collection methods concerning their lack of success in achieving a principal position. Portraits were used to illuminate the journey of these candidates as they completed the necessary requirements, developed the skill vital to becoming a principal, and interviewed for prospective openings.

The findings revealed that the barrier to the principalship for these candidates is their own lack of awareness regarding who they are and what they know as it pertains to the principalship and their lack of self reflection and self correction skills.

Implications for further study include, a study of principal candidates who have acquired principalship after a significant length of time and their perceptions of what corrections they made that advanced their career; comparison study of the preparation experiences of principal candidates who were successful in getting a principalship in contrast to principal candidates who were unable to advance to the role; and a repeat of this study using male candidates.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### Background

The large pool of prepared principal candidates that do not currently hold a job is disturbing and in contrast to reports of principal shortages. Across the nation school districts are reporting shortages of highly qualified candidates (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2007). In some parts of the country the need for principals will increase by sixty two percent in the next five years (Peterson, 2001). Despite the proposed shortages enrollment and graduation statistic from educational leadership programs show increasing numbers (Murphy, 2005; Villani, 2006). The number of vacancies, licensed principal candidates, and the reports of shortages create a perplexing dilemma that is difficult to understand. What is apparent is the intensified scrutiny of school principals in light of the public demand for more effective schools, the critical skills needed by principals, preparation programs that are inadequate, the need for some form of additional support to help principal candidates advance to the principalship, and the fact that principal candidates who have successfully navigated the necessary path to become principals may not be seen as “highly qualified” thus failing to advance to the role.

**Characteristics of principals.** Current research attributes school success to strong leadership by the principal (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Coddling & Marc, 2002; Cotton, 2003). Yet, the job of this era principal is vastly different from the one that existed in previous decades; today leaders are needed who can do a job

that has never been advertised before and one that currently serving principals were never expected to do (Coddling & Marc, 2002) . The 1990's ushered in an era that shifted the role of the school principal from manager to instructional leader (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). The evolution of this role has continued to increase the demands on principals to respond to state benchmarks and high stakes accountability while creating a vision that others will follow and designing an organization that is successful. Additionally, principals must also be prepared to address an increasing number of societal ills that infiltrate schools.

Many principal candidates and current principals are often inadequately prepared to meet the new demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century schools despite the delineation of necessary leadership skills. It was over four decades ago in 1966 that J.S. Coleman identified leadership as a critical component of effective schools. Edmonds (1979) followed up this research by identifying the following common behaviors found among leaders of effective schools: (1) promote a safe orderly environment; (2) frequently monitor student progress; (3) ensure that staff knows how to provide differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all learners; (4) set clear goals and learning objectives; (5) clearly communicated mission and goals; and (6) demonstration of strong leadership, management, and instructional leadership skills. With the characteristics and behaviors of effective principals outlined the task of preparing and identifying those who demonstrate these qualities should be easy. However, the job of preparing principals to meet the emergent challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has remained a difficult task.

**Principal Preparation.** The increased scrutiny from the public has prompted researchers, policy makers and educators to re-evaluate preparation programs and selection practices. There is vast disagreement about what should be taught and who should be allowed to lead. Some reformers advocate for the recruitment of leaders outside of the educational arena while others believe it is important to have leaders who are grounded in the practice of teaching (Davis, et al., 2007). Some advocates believe the leadership potential of a candidate is more important than their academic aptitude (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). The screening and selection processes for principals has also become controversial. There is a faction convinced that the current requirements should be more rigorous while another believe the requirements should be reduced (Dipaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Gronn, 2002). In addition there is a body of research that discusses the different skill set needed by principals in different school environments (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). With such a vast point of view the critical components of principal preparation remains elusive to educational institutions, school districts and states.

Historically leadership preparation programs have been characterized as antiquated and out of touch with the realities of schooling (Daresh & Playko, 1992). Examination of current programs find the climates and cultures fall short of providing the relevant skills necessary for today's leaders to lead 21<sup>st</sup> century schools (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). The results of a public agenda survey of hundreds of school principals and superintendants revealed that 69 % of principals surveyed believed that traditional leadership preparation programs were inadequate (Bloom, Castagna, Moire, & Warren,

2005; Lashway, 2003). A long term comprehensive study of principal preparation programs by Levine (2005) concluded that the majority of existing principal preparation programs were unsuccessful in developing principals. These programs were designed to formally train administrative candidates to become school principals who can promote the development of good schools that provide learning opportunities for all students (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Lashway, 2003). Yet, the programs are often designed and implemented in a manner that does not support adult learners.

**Mentors and advocates.** Principal candidates that are successful in acquiring principalships report that they had some type of assistance in the form of a mentor or an advocate along their journey. Administrative hopefuls who find the support of a mentor and an advocate have a better chance of moving into administration (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Marshall, et al. 1992). Mentoring relationships have become increasingly popular with 32 states implementing some form of mentoring program to assist school administrators in the past decade (Daresh, 2004). Mentors help protégés achieve formation through reflective practice that brings about understanding of one's personal values and the role of formal leadership (Villani, 2006). In a public agenda survey conducted in 2001, fifty two percent of the principals surveyed responded that it was the mentoring and guidance of colleagues that provided the most valuable preparation for the principalship (Villani, 2006).

The role of the advocate is very different from the role of the mentor. Advocates promote candidates who have achieved formation and are consistently demonstrating high levels of readiness to assume the next level of leadership (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Skrla, Erlandson, Reed, & Wilson, 2001). Advocates are willing to challenge the

beliefs of others and place their reputation on the line in support of a candidate.

Advocates are often those seated in the political arena of the school district and well connected. They are able to use their influence to promote a candidate through networking and sharing to their peers and superiors about the merits and abilities of their candidate. It is critical that principal candidates have an advocate. Advocacy is often the key that unlocks the door that leads to a principalship. As noted by Marshall, Mitchell, Gross, & Scott (1992) and Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004), candidates who have an advocate have a better chance of advancing the career ladder into school leadership.

**Summary.** There has not been a clearly designated path to the principalship. It has been documented that the role of the principal is critical to the operation of an effective school (Coddling & Marc, 2002). It is also a known fact that principal candidates must be the recipients of adequate leadership preparation in a variety of settings and models that support adult learning (Brookfield, 1993; Murphy, 2005). However, there has not been a clearly designated path to the principalship. An understanding has been established that principal candidates who have the support of a mentor or an advocate have a better opportunity of obtaining a principalship. What is still uncertain is why after all is done some principal candidates advance to the level of principal and other equally qualified candidates do not.

## **Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study**

Since all principal candidates typically experience the same types of formal preparation experiences it is important to understand what transpires after the formal preparation that is responsible for catapulting or sinking a principal candidate's career. In view of the fact that learning in the andragogical framework is a personal experience it is important to understand the role that each individual learner assumes with knowledge acquisition. For the purposes of this study the behaviorist and the critical andragogical framework will be utilized to evaluate the factors that are determinants of a principal candidate's succession to the role.

Acting from the behaviorist frame the adult learner creates a plan of action that includes behavior objectives and task associated with learning the desired skills (Caffarella, 1993). This perspective allows the learner to be self-directed and self-selective in determining their learning needs and what task would best facilitate the learning. Chene (1983), describes the self-directed autonomous learner as independent, decisive, and articulate regarding the norms and limits of a learning society. Candy (1991), adds to this description by characterizing self-directed autonomous learners as people who have a strong sense of personal values and beliefs that provide a solid foundation for the development of plans and goals.

Self-directed learning is important to adult learning and leadership development. It is important to acknowledge the background knowledge and lived experiences that an individual possesses and capitalize on those experiences to enhance learning. Self-directed learning is viewed as the essence of what adult learning is all about. Leadership development is a self directed process that requires candidates to take initiatives that

demonstrate their readiness to lead and their desire to engage in leadership enhancing opportunities. In the behaviorist frame licensed candidates must continue to seek experiences that enhance their leadership skills and networking opportunities. If candidates return to their current job routine after leadership training and do not seek opportunities to showcase what they know they may be left to languish at this level.

The critical framework is probably the most important in relationship to leadership development. In this frame the learner self-actualizes. All of the knowledge and skill transition to activity that supports the environment and setting of the leader. The adult learner becomes adept at critical reflection and analysis and capable of using the acquired skill and knowledge to understand the society they work in and respond effectively to change (Welton, 1993). The critical framework allows the learner to bring about change in the organization through critical reflection and analysis of the learning and its link to the assumptions of the learner in relationship to the present social, political, and economic order. The learner takes an in-depth look at the structure and functioning of the society in which they work as a means of understanding and responding to change effectively (Welton, 1993).

In order to achieve formation of the learned information principal candidates must seize opportunities to develop leadership skills and become active participants in solving important educational problems (Merriam, 2001). Successful principals are typically action oriented, self-motivated, and possess an intrinsic drive to succeed. In a study by Elmore (2000), principal candidates who acquired the knowledge and skills to be leaders did so as a result of their own personal values and desires. Candidates at this level must continue self reflection and self correction. It is important that candidates understand and

make the necessary adjustment to perceptions about who they are and what they do.

Those who fail to make the necessary corrections often have trouble advancing to the next level. In a case study by (Marshall, et. al, 1992), a principal candidate expressed his dissatisfaction with the promotion process. The principal saw merit in his leadership ability, however the teachers he worked with consistently reported his lack of interpersonal skills. This candidate failed to make changes that would have allowed others to see him differently; consequently he failed to advance to a principalship.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time of mass exodus of contemporary school leadership. The number of principals retiring and the limited number available to replace them dominate current research (Dipaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Shen & Sanders-Crawford, 2003). “Sixty-six percent of respondents to a National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) survey in 2002 indicated that they will retire in the next 6-10 years” (Villani, 2006, p. 5). Yet, there is not a shortage of certified principals. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) reports that all states have large pools of candidates; Texas has more than 7,000 and Georgia has 3,200 certified principals that do not currently hold the job (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2003). The large pool of qualified candidates that do not hold the position of principal gives rise to the question; why are there so many licensed principal candidates that do not hold the position? The answer could be contained in the preparation and selection practices or in the science of Andragogy where candidates assimilate the critical skills needed to be leaders.

The challenge to endow principals with the essential skills needed for success has yet to be overcome. There is an unexplained discrepancy regarding preparation and readiness to be successful on the job. This discrepancy has not been explained through traditional venues. The essential leadership skills that principals should possess have been identified (Coddling & Marc, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). What remains a mystery is the acquisition of these skills. Formal programs attempt to address the needs of future leaders. However, the formula for success appears to lie in the qualities and skills each leader brings to the position and the ability of each leader to synthesize the knowledge gained in formal preparation programs with the practical experiences of their entire educational experience and applies them to the job.

University principal preparation programs are the primary source for preparing school principals. These programs are expected to support the critical development of leaders able to foster and sustain school improvement and equip principals with the skills and qualities to successfully lead. Yet, these well intentioned programs are blamed for the leadership gaps that exist when candidates fail to transition to the role of principal. Since the 1990's there has been significant inquiry into leadership preparation practices culminating with agreement among researchers that traditional university preparation alone is insufficient to prepare leaders for 21<sup>st</sup> century schools (Davis, et. al, 2007). The introduction of some type of practical field experience has been helpful, but it has not closed the gap between theory and practice that plagues some principal candidates. Nor has it explained why equal credentialing requirements yield unequal results as principal candidates seek positions.

When principal candidates complete their leadership training, they exhibit varying levels of readiness to deal with the demands of the job. To date there has not been a clear explanation of why some principals exhibit high levels of competence and readiness for their first assignment and others do not. Attempted explanations have addressed school variables such as demographics and achievement levels (Cotton, 2003). Yet, few studies have addressed the personal qualities, skill set and the experiences of the principal candidate as they approach the role (Coddling & Marc, 2002). Since all principals participate in the initial preparation experiences required to enter the field, effective principal candidates must have qualities and experiences beyond this training where additional skills are developed that enhance their success. It is evident that some principal candidates display competence upon completion of the licensure process and quickly advance to the role of principal. What is puzzling is the number of candidates that complete licensure requirements and do not advance. The need exists to identify those factors that prevent licensed principal candidates from advancing to the role.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to expand and deepen the knowledge about the factors that act as barriers for principal candidates who have been unsuccessful in becoming principals. The study will develop an understanding of how and what experiences influenced the lack of advancement as well as how those experiences are interpreted and meaning constructed. As a result of illuminating the factors that prevent principal candidates from becoming principals, it is my hope that a greater understanding of the transformative experiences and growth opportunities for principal candidates will emerge.

## **Research Question**

The following questions will guide this study:

What are the factors identified by licensed principal candidates that exemplify the barriers they perceive have prevented them from advancement to the role of principal?

## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Design Controls**

**Assumptions.** This investigation is based on the assumption that licensed principal candidates who have not been successful in obtaining a principalship would be willing to participate in interviews. It is further assumed that each participant would answer the questions and any follow-up questions fully and honestly. Finally, it is assumed that perceived barriers to seeking a principalship will be illuminated during the interview by those individuals who are licensed to become principals but have not obtained positions.

**Limitations and design controls.** Limitations of this study include:

1. The sample will be limited to educators who are principal license holders, who reside in Pinellas County, Florida, but are not currently serving as school principals.
2. The sample will consist of principal candidates who have been licensed for a minimum of three years and have interviewed for the job of principal a minimum of three times.
3. The interview data represents the perceptions of principal candidates during the 2009-2010 school year. The findings will not reflect how similar populations might respond at other times.

4. This study is influenced by the sensitivity and bias of the researcher who has a professional association with members of the sample. As suggested by Bogdan and Bilken (2007), the researcher bracketed biases and minimized the influence by being more reflective and conscious of how “who you are” may shape and enrich what is studied.

**Definition of Key Terms.** The following working definitions are provided for this study:

*Advocate.* Assisting prepared principal candidates to successfully navigate the challenges of moving to the next level of leadership through sponsorship that leads to promotion.

*Andragogy.* The art and science of adult learning; how adults learn (Knowles, 1980).

*Formation.* The process of synthesizing the learning acquired through coursework and experience into a personalized appreciation of what it means to be an educational leader (Daresh, 1990).

*Principal candidates.* Candidates that hold principal licensure.

*Mentor.* Support from a more experienced colleague to help a beginner or someone new to a position perform at a high level (Villani, 2006).

## **Summary**

The need to identify the factors that act as barriers to the principalship for some candidates has motivated this research study. At a time when principal attrition is high due to an aging workforce, there is a high level of increased school accountability, and ongoing efforts to reform how principals are trained; all candidates who hold the licensure should be highly qualified. Since principal candidates typically undergo the same training understanding why they do not all become principal's prompts research to

look for answers that extend beyond the training and preparation phase. Principal candidates must be examined on an individual level to determine if there are similarities in their perceptions of why they have not become principal.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This review of literature begins by reviewing the effective schools movement and its role in identifying leadership as a key component of effective schools. The characteristics of effective schools and the behaviors of effective leaders are then discussed by examining the ways that school leadership behaviors influence school learning environments and student achievement. Next, the role of teacher leadership, the assistant principalship, mentoring and advocacy will be examined as it relates to the journey toward the principalship. Finally, a review of the need for preparation practices and programs that adequately prepare school leaders and the barriers that prevent principal candidates from acquiring the position of principal are examined.

**Purpose.** Everyone knows the importance and necessity of leadership. The success or failure of a company, team, or school is largely dependent upon the leader. When there are positive outcomes the leader is praised. Consequently, if there is failure in the organization the leader is held accountable. There is substantial research documenting the importance of the principal to the success of the school (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Davis, et.al., 2007). There is an equivalent body of research describing the skills and behaviors necessary to be an effective principal (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Gronn, 2002; Shen & Sanders-Crawford, 2003). The intent of this literature review is to contribute to the research on the essential preparation experiences of principals and in doing so enabling principal candidates to identify the barriers that impede them from advancing to

the role of principal. It is important that principals clearly differentiate and understand their leadership roles and responsibilities. Without an understanding of the essential responsibilities and functions principal candidates will never achieve success as an effective leader of a school. The literature below provides some examples of the different experiences that serve as preparation for the principalship. This review will examine the role of teacher leadership, mentoring, the assistant principalship, and advocacy as pre-principalship experiences that are an integral part of principal preparation. These experiences have been outlined in isolated studies and deemed to have merit as vital leadership preparation experiences. They have yet to be reviewed as interrelated concepts that link together and create a pathway of training effective principals through practical applications. Since there has not been a clearly designated path to the principalship it is my goal to provide insight into these practices as they relate to principal preparation and the formation of an understanding of the requirements for advancement to the role of principal.

Self directed adults who engage in teacher leadership with some form of mentoring advance to effective assistant principalships where an advocate strategically guides them to an effective principalship. Each of these components is necessary and follows a sequence. Principal preparation programs are designed to be transformational with the transformation process centered on learning new skills, concepts, language, and preparing to change from the educational climate of instructor to that of leader (Quinn & Cooper, 2008). This can only be done through a leadership preparation process that allows for development through a series of predetermined stages guided by the individual.

**Changing Context of Schools and Leadership.** Twenty first century school principals are asked to lead in a new world marked by unprecedented responsibilities, challenges, and managerial opportunities (Quinn & Cooper, 2008). They are required to redesign schools and move them from the past to the present by rethinking goals, accessing priorities, and realigning resources. The “No Child Left Behind” legislation elevated the role of the principal to a critical level and it has become evident that principals who are ill equipped for the task are being left behind (Hess & Kelly, 2005). The job of this era principal is vastly different from the one that existed in previous decades; today leaders are needed who can do a job that has never been advertised before and one that currently serving principals were never expected to do (Coddling & Marc, 2002).

The job of preparing principals to meet the emergent challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a difficult task. Since the 1990’s there has been significant inquiry into leadership preparation practices (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2007). “There is significant research about the importance of the principal and the impact school leaders have on student achievement and the well being of the school community” (Villani, 2006, p. 4). There is also an equivalent body of research that discusses the skills that effective leaders must possess and how those skills are obtained.

It is a well documented fact that the traditional preparation provided by universities is only a small portion of the prerequisites that lead to an effective principalship (Daresh & Playko, 1992). These formal principal preparation programs have received much criticism for failing to equip principals for the challenges and opportunities posed by 21<sup>st</sup> century demands (Hess & Kelly, 2005). With this in mind the

path that leads to an effective principalship must consist of practical experiences and opportunities for application in real world education settings. There is isolated research on the experiences that foster school leadership development. When discussed and analyzed together these experiences indicate that most effective principals follow a path that begins with teacher leadership and includes mentoring, the assistant principalship, and advocacy. Hopkins-Thompson's (2000, p.29) research confirms that formal preparation is only a small part of leadership development and poses several questions regarding leadership development that may be answered succinctly when the isolated disconnected pieces are linked together to chart a clearer preparation pathway: (1) how can school leaders be cultivated and equipped for the challenges they will face?; (2) How can learning be accelerated and made more meaningful?; and ( 3) How can prospective principals learn from their experiences and tap collegial frameworks?

## Definition of Terms

The terms that appear in this review are defined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Definition of Terms**

<b>Terms</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<b>Advocacy</b>	Assisting prepared leadership candidates to successfully navigate the challenges of moving to the next level of leadership through sponsorship that leads to promotion.
<b>Andragogy</b>	The art and science of adult learning; how adults learn (Knowles, 1980).
<b>Effective Principal</b>	A principal who achieves formation of the essential leadership components and utilizes leadership behavior in such a way that it promotes a positive school environment and high student achievement as evidenced by standardized test scores, school grades, and staff climate surveys.
<b>Formation</b>	The process of synthesizing the learning acquired through coursework and experience into a personalized appreciation of what it means to be an educational leader (Daresh, 1990).
<b>Mentoring</b>	Support from a more experienced colleague to help a beginner or someone new to a position perform at a high level (Villani, 2006).
<b>Teacher Leadership</b>	Teachers who assume leadership roles within a school as a manner of gaining access to the next level of school leadership.
<b>School Leaders</b>	Principals
<b>Socialization</b>	“The process by which skills, values, and dispositions of the profession are internalized by school leaders” (Lashway, 2003, p 2).

## What does Leadership Theory say about the Development of Effective School Principals?

**Theoretical Framework.** Educators seeking leadership roles become adult learners. Adult learners have their own specific learning needs that are qualitatively different from those of children. There is a considerable amount of literature that addresses adult learning theory and the critical characteristics of adults and their learning

patterns (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Malcolm Knowles is the best known advocate of the adult learning theory andragogy. His work encouraged others to write in the field of adult education (Caffarella, 1993; Candy, 1991; Chene, 1983; Merriam, 1993). These writings form the basis for understanding the nature of how adults learn and will help those designing and conducting school leadership preparation programs understand the failures of the past and create more effective learning processes that meet the current learning needs of leadership candidates (Knowles, et al. 2005).

**Philosophical Assumptions Underlying Adult Learning.** Adult learning theory is grounded in the humanistic perspective. From this perspective the needs of the learner are seen as more important than the content to be learned and relegate the educator to the role of facilitator and guide as opposed to content expert (Knowles, 1980). The focus of learning is on the individual and self development. The learner is expected to assume primary responsibility for their own learning (Merriam, 1993). Although humanism is the primary philosophical point of view for adult learning, three other perspectives provide important clues for leadership development and warrant attention; progressivism, behaviorism, and critical theory. The progressivist point of view is very similar to the humanistic viewpoint with the belief that the learners experiences are key to the learning process. Learning is realistic and practical with the learner assuming responsibility for their own learning and the educator serving as a guide and supporter (Tough, 1979). In the behaviorist philosophy the learner develops plans that direct the learning process. These plans include behavioral objectives and includes the task associated with acquiring the outlined skills (Caffarella, 1993). In this philosophical perspective researchers question the validity of self-directed learning in regards to accountability and quality

(Caffarella, 1993). The critical framework allows the learner to bring about change in the organization through critical reflection and analysis of the learning and its link to the assumptions of the learner in relationship to the present social, political, and economic order. The learner takes an indepth look at the structure and functioning of the society in which they work as a means of understanding and responding to change effectively (Welton, 1993).

**Characteristics of Adult Learners.** There has been much debate over the salient qualities of adult learners, yet most researchers agree with the four critical characteristics of adults and their patterns of learning identified by Knowles (1980): (1) self direction; (2) experience; (3) orientation toward learning developmental task of assigned social role; and (4) a shift from self-centeredness to problem-centeredness learning. There is an underlying assumption in these adult learning characteristics that learning in adulthood means growth in self-direction and autonomy (Candy, 1991; Chene, 1983; Knowles, 1980). Chene (1983), describes the self-directed autonomous learner as independent, decisive, and articulate regarding the norms and limits of a learning society. Candy (1991), adds to this description by characterizing self-directed autonomous learners as people who have a strong sense of personal values and beliefs that provide a solid foundation for the development of plans and goals. School leadership candidates must be especially adept at self-direction and self management. Formal opportunities for them to learn typically turn them into passive recipients of knowledge. In order to achieve formation of the learned information school leadership candidates must seize

opportunities to develop leadership skills and become active participants in solving important educational problems (Merriam , 2001). Successful principals are typically action oriented, self-motivated, and possess an intrinsic drive to succeed.

**The Self-directed Learner.** Self-directed learning is viewed as the essence of what adult learning is all about. It has captivated the attention of many adult educators (Caffarella, 1993). Tough (1979), confirmed through his research that many adults can and do learn primarily through their own initiative. Leadership development is a self directed process that requires candidates to take initiatives that demonstrate their readiness to lead and their desire to engage in leadership enhancing opportunities. Those who become principals are usually educators who were dynamic teacher leaders and assistant principals. Rarely are great school leaders found waiting in the classroom to be called to duty.

Because adult learners benefit from a learner-centered approach they recognize the value of experiences to the topic they are learning about and understand that they must acquire the information they need. They are self motivated and are able to connect their personal experiences to the learning (Merriam , 2001). The experiences of the learner, their self-directedness, and autonomy are essential elements in the learning process for adults as lifelong learners and school leaders (Fisher, 1995).

**Creating a Supportive Environment for Adult Learners.** The adult learning environment must be carefully constructed and managed to ensure optimal adult learning situations. The climate has to be a balance of collaboration and independent learning and requirements and individual choice. There must be encouragement, support, and opportunities for individualized exploration. Fisher (1995) recommends that the adult learning environment provide format, organization and sequence while retaining the freedom and flexibility that allows a person to explore and develop within boundaries.

According to Brookfield (1993) rigidly structured learning environments impede the natural growth and development of the learner and often force conformity to the organizational norms that promote individual success. He further recommends that self directed learners be given the opportunity to create learning networks and study groups that allows the exchange of knowledge and reflection on what is being learned. Brookfield (1993) emphasizes the importance of the experiential methods such as case studies, role play, simulations, and internships that provide practice and implementation of the learning. Experiential methods naturally foster reflection as the adult learner thinks about and evaluates the experience (Fisher, 1995). Brookfield (1993) and Fisher (1995) agree that reflection and collaboration are important components in adult learning.

It is important to remember that self-directed learning is not synonymous with being self taught (Fisher, 1995). Knowles (1975) points out that self-directed learning does imply that learning takes place in isolation. Self- directed learning takes place in association with a variety of people that assist, help, mentor, and tutor. It is crucial that adult learners receive guidance and support as they seek to learn new skills and construct meaning through experience. Knowles (1984) consistently pointed out the importance of

the relationship between the learner and the facilitator. He emphasized that the andragogical approach requires a climate of mutual respect, collaboration, trust, and support. He further indicated that it is the responsibility of the facilitator to create a caring accepting, respectful, helping atmosphere. Thus the development of school leaders must take place in a culture that allows the participant to practice, model, and interact as a process of gaining mastery.

**Reflection.** Reflection is not a new idea; it has been widely discussed as a critical component of preparing 21<sup>st</sup> century educators. In fact, John Dewey (1933, p.6) believed that critical reflection was one of the most important qualities of an educator. He defined reflection as an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds supporting it and future conclusion to which it tends. As a result of Schon's (1991) research the interest in reflection in the context of education heightened. Reflection has become a way for educators to construct meaning and gain knowledge that will serve as a guide for their actions. Schon (1991) explains that tacit and repetitive daily practices in a profession create missed opportunities to think about what is occurring. He further contends that reflection is the practitioner's weapon for correction. Through reflection current understandings are criticized and questioned freeing the practitioner to draw new conclusions and explore new experiences (Schon, 1991).

Reflection is critical to the developing leader who will be required to reconstruct knowledge and use it to solve problems and improve the system. Schon (1991) introduced 3 stages of reflection; reflection on action, reflection in action and reflection for action. Each of these reflective stages can be applied to leadership development. In

the reflection on action stage the leader reflects on an event that has already occurred with the goal of determining if the course of action taken was the best option. Reflection in action occurs while the leader is currently engaged in an activity and reflection for action takes place prior to an event as the leader prepares to make the best decision. The promotion of reflection as a critical component of leadership development increases the likelihood that leaders make essential connections between practical experience theoretical knowledge, and application to real world settings.

### **What are the Characteristics of Effective School Principals?**

**Historic Perspective of Effective Schools.** The school effectiveness movement was launched by J.S. Coleman in 1966 with his published account of poverty and home environment as critical barriers to student learning. The Coleman Report concluded that leadership is a critical component of effective schools. In each of the studies outlined in this review, leadership was identified as a critical element of successful schools. In addition leaders of successful schools were identified as having behaviors and practices tantamount to successful school environments.

The Reading, Inner-City Children study conducted by George Weber (1971) revealed through interviews with the staff and observations of classrooms that successful schools frequently monitor student progress and maintain a safe orderly environment. Weber also noted that leadership appeared to be a significant factor with school administrators setting the tone for the school, assuming responsibility for the instruction, allocating resources, and developing and communicating the mission. The resulting conclusions pointed toward the school as the determinant of success in students reading achievement. In a study conducted by Ronald Edmonds (1979), similar findings indicated

that all students could be successfully educated; and schools and leadership make a difference. According to Edmond's, leadership is the key component of effective schools. He identified the following common behaviors found among leaders of effective schools: (1) promote a safe orderly environment; (2) frequently monitor student progress; (3) ensure that staff knows how to provide differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all learners; (4) set clear goals and learning objectives; (5) clearly communicated mission and goals; and (6) demonstration of strong leadership, management, and instructional leadership skills (Edmonds, 1979).

In 1974 the state of New York conducted a pivotal study, *The New York State Performance Review*, which confirmed the findings of Weber and introduced school environment as a component of student's successful achievement. In this study two inner-city schools with similar environmental characteristics and different achievement scores on standardized reading test were examined. The analysis revealed that differences in achievement levels were directly related to school factors that could be controlled by the leadership. The principal of the effective school led the development of instructional planning and monitored the progress of students and teachers. The effective school principal maintained a good balance between management and instructional leadership (State of New York, 1974).

The *California School Effectiveness study* conducted in 1976 produced data comparable to the data from the study by Weber and *The New York State Performance Review*. This study was more rigorous and utilized 21 schools with matching characteristics but differed on standardized achievement scores. The study disclosed five factors that distinguish effective school from less effective schools: (1) teacher support;

(2) environment conducive to learning; (3) principals involvement with instructional decision making; (4) progress monitoring; and (5) emphasis on achievement (Madden, Lawson, & Sweet, 1976). Again these factors are reasoned to be directly impacted by the principal.

Ronald Edmonds contributed to this body of research with *The School Improvement project, 1979* study. This study was conducted in nine New York City elementary schools and utilized the five factors associated with school effectiveness identified by Edmonds in earlier studies: (1) administrative style; (2) School climate; (3) school wide emphasis on instruction; (4) high expectations by teacher; and (5) progress monitoring. City wide reading achievement scores were examined for a three year period to identify improving schools and maintaining/declining schools. The schools were from different districts and matched on environmental variables. The teachers in improving schools reported a high level of administrative involvement in instruction, an orderly environment and positive communication with administration. The teachers in the maintaining declining schools indicated a lack of supervision in instructional leadership and a significant number of the teachers reported inadequate instructional materials and in-service training (Edmonds, 1979).

Each of the studies reviewed revealed common characteristics of effective schools (Edmonds, 1979; Madden, et. al., 1976; State of New York, 1974; Weber, 1971). In all of the studies effective school had principals who emphasized achievement, encouraged and supported instructional strategies, frequently monitored student progress, and maintained a safe orderly environment. Zigarelli, (1996) concluded from a review of seven studies on school effectiveness that principals with strong leadership skills and a willingness to

actively participate in instructional leadership create more successful schools. He also found through his review that principals who held more control over human resource issues such as hiring and firing of instructional staff and were not overburdened with managerial task were more effective.

While these studies clearly implicate the principal's role as an essential component of school effectiveness the findings of the studies pose limitations. The studies primarily used urban elementary schools as the locations, utilized basic math and literacy scores, and held a consistent advocacy for the poor theme. In addition much of the research by Ronald Edmonds which has been successfully replicated in a variety of settings; suburban, rural, urban, high school, middle school, and elementary school; has been done in smaller school settings with populations much smaller than the average public school setting. This smaller setting is often attributed to the success rate because many of the factors that large schools struggle with are eliminated. In some of the replicated studies success was determined by student attendance at competitive high schools, graduation rates and college entrance rates. Many of the effective schools in the studies emphasized clear school goals and discipline in a supportive environment as practices that remove some of the challenges that impede student achievement.

**Characteristics of effective schools.** Researchers of the effective schools movement have consistently uncovered common characteristics among schools that have uncharacteristically high achievement levels among students from a lower socio-economic status. Although the characteristics identified by different researchers vary, they all tend to include the characteristics formally identified by John Edmonds in his 1982 publication the *Correlates of Effective Schools*. In this publication, Edmonds

formally identified strong instructional leadership, a strong sense of mission, effective instructional behaviors, high expectations for all students, frequent monitoring of student achievement, and a safe and orderly environment as essential elements to effective schools (Lezotte L. , n.d.). A review of school effectiveness research by Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, (1995) yielded a list of eleven factors identified as promoting school effectiveness and improvement. This list added positive reinforcement, pupil rights and responsibilities, home-school partnership, and school based staff development to the essential elements outlined by Edmonds (Sammons, et al. 1995).

It is important to note that the correlates of effective schools are associative and cannot be used as a fail proof recipe for success because other variables may pose challenges that alter the outcome (Sammons, et al. 1995). This is a limitation for the research in this area. The majority of the studies have not controlled for variables that may cause variation in the results.

Through effective schools research it is abundantly clear that the implementation of the effective schools correlates requires strong leadership at the school level. In fact, effective schools and effective leaders are synonymous. One does not appear to be able to exist without the other. With this in mind, it is important to note that without strong leadership the other effective school correlates cannot be accomplished. The principal is alone at the school; no one on campus has more authority or responsibility. The principal is expected to have all the answers, stand for all the decisions and be the guiding force behind the entire school operation.

**Essential Behaviors of Effective Principals.** It is clear that effective leaders exercise indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and on the achievement of students (Coddling & Marc, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; ). The identification of future school leaders begins with a clear understanding of the characteristics that are to be sought in those who would be effective. With the characteristics and behaviors of effective principals outlined the task of identifying those who demonstrate these qualities is easy. A common barrier to successful identification has been a lack of knowing what to expect from principals. There is a great deal of role ambiguity and confusion that is grounded in differences among districts, schools, student populations and leadership styles. The effective schools research advanced the knowledge in this field when school leadership was identified as one of the most frequent correlates of effective schooling; emphasizing the principal's role as planner, leader, facilitator, and decision maker (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Lezotte L. , n.d.).

This phase of the effective schools research has primarily focused on the role of the principal as the difference between effective and less effective schools and demonstrated that the school leader exercises a great deal of direct and indirect influence over student achievement. The direct influence is easy to observe through the funding of resources and level of professional development provided, however indirect influence is subtle and invisible to the eye. It is transmitted through the leader's practices that relate to teacher quality, school climate, parental involvement and the overall learning environment of the school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). In addition there is significant

evidence that indicates that even when a direct relationship between leadership behavior and student achievement is not evident the school leader is still exercising indirect influence (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

Research inquiry by notable researchers introduced the phrase “principal as instructional leader” and produced evidence to support student achievement based on the principal’s initiatory behavior and the emphasis on instructional outcomes (Cotton, 2003; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Wimpelberg, Teddlie, & Stringfield, 1989). This research phase produced a rich array of findings among which various sets of leadership behaviors related to instruction and highest student achievement were noted. Cotton (2003) described 26 principal behaviors that contribute to student achievement. She grouped the behaviors into five categories: (1) establishing a clear focus on student learning; (2) interactions and relationships; (3) school culture; (4) instruction; and (5) accountability. Fullen (2001) recognized the five essential components of effective school leadership as: (1) moral purpose; (2) understanding the change process; (3) building relationships; (4) creating and sharing new knowledge; and (5) coherence-making in the face of constant change. A myriad of studies continue to document these qualities and others like them as strongly contributing to student achievement. Yet in a study by Walberg and Lane (1985), it was noted that in most schools the principal does not serve as the instructional leader. In a 1992 study Heck came to a similar conclusion about principals and their level of involvement in instructional leadership (Heck, 1992). Current research continues to document the same conclusions; principals spend the majority of their time on administrative and managerial task (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Veteran principals who received their charge prior to the enlightened age of school accountability may lack the

knowledge to be instructional leaders and the desire or opportunity to make the change. Thus it is imperative that current and emergent leadership preparation programs include opportunities for candidates to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to create environments that promote student achievement.

Researchers such as Ronald Edmonds (1979), Lawrence Lezotte (n.d.), and Wilbur Brookover, Flood, Beady, Schweitzer, and Wisenbaker (1979) identified schools that were effectively educating all students looking for commonalities among effective schools that contributed to their success. In preliminary studies they concluded that there were distinct leadership differences in effective and ineffective schools. Effective school leaders were more assertive, more effective disciplinarians, and assumed greater responsibility as an instructional leader (Edmonds, 1979). Further investigations by Brookover, et al. (1979) examined the differences in school social systems in an attempt to explain differences in student outcomes among similar schools. The successful schools in the study consistently demonstrated high performance on standardized test and it was attributed to the past and present principal. The past principal had been an educational leader who emphasized instructional strategies and prepared teachers through in-service training. When the principal was reassigned the new principal focused on instruction by supervising and encouraging teachers to attend seminars, workshops, and in-service programs designed to increase their effectiveness in the classroom. In contrast, principals in the less effective schools exhibited behaviors that were more administrative and managerial. These principals were bogged down with paperwork and operated out of a survival mode. There was concern for instruction and student achievement but little consistent effort made to keep it in the forefront.

In a study conducted by James Bauck, (1985) reviewing the middle level principalship, he concluded that effective principals were tenured, held a very positive outlook about their job, exhibited a high degree of job satisfaction, tended to see problems as less insurmountable, were more teacher oriented and possessed the ability to work with people and their multiple expectations. In addition the effective principals in his study were effective time managers, involved the parents and the community in the school and tended to be found in larger school communities with high student enrollment, more counselors and higher per pupil expenditure. (Bauck, 1985).

Researchers Fullen (1992) and Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) have expounded on the instructional leadership correlate with various theoretical models, yet there is still considerable controversy surrounding the identification of effective instructional leadership practices and little empirical evidence to support that increased time devoted to instructional leadership by the principal improves student academic performance. Research conclusions regarding the impact of the principal's role in student achievement ranges from vastly optimistic assessments to no impact at all (Coddling & Marc, 2002). In contrast John Gray (1990) draws attention to the fact that there is no evidence that ineffective schools have weak leadership. Reviews by Cotton (2003), Hallinger and Murphy (1982) and Purkey and Smith (1983) conclude that leadership is a non-negotiable when it comes to initiating and maintaining school improvement.

Some principals are leading schools toward substantial improvement while others operate in a survival mode. The disparity in the success of principal's illustrate the importance of the preparation process in the development of the effective school leadership proficiencies required of the principal in order to make a school academically

and financially sound. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has intensified the emphasis on the role of the principal as fundamental to the improvement of learning for all students (Cotton, 2003). Principals are expected to lead schools toward substantial improvements viewed from the viewpoints of academia and the community's opinion. With this in mind, current research has converged on the three most important aspects of the principal's job:

1. developing a deep understanding of how to support teachers
2. managing the curriculum in ways that promote student learning and
3. Developing the ability to transform schools into more effective organizations that foster powerful teaching and learning for all students (Davis, et al. 2007, p.5).

This research is pivotal to improving the preparation process and grounding it in the principles of andragogy that create optimal learning environments for adults. It is crucial that those who lead not only acquire leadership skills, but have the initiative, self-direction and autonomy to apply those skills in a world of continuous personal, societal, and educational change.

### **What Role does the Teaching Experience Play in the Development of Effective Principals?**

Teaching can be a catalyst for school leadership development for those willing to assume peer leadership roles. In the past couple of decades teacher leadership has emerged as a prominent element of school reform and leadership development (Little, 2003). Teacher leadership is one manner of securing teachers commitment to the field while developing and training leadership successors. This concept was recognized during the late 1980's when whole school reform efforts produced new definitions of leadership

roles that included” leadership capacity” (Little, 1990). Leadership capacity suggests the development of all adults within the school community as skillful leaders (Lambert, 2003). This reform effort shaped leadership opportunities for teachers in the form of career ladder and mentor teacher programs, lead teachers and department leaders, and policies to decentralize and involve teachers in school and district level decision making (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, nd; Little, 1990).

Although teacher leadership has been overlooked and misinterpreted it is a powerful force within a school. It has great potential for successful school reform while providing the added bonus of identifying individuals for formal leadership roles. Teachers leaders are assigned to positions of quasi administrative roles that advanced the career ladder and allowed them to share in the managerial task associated with operating a school (Little, 2003). These leadership experiences are necessary for any teacher who desires to move into school leadership. Most district level school leadership requirements and programs require candidates to have some level of experience in administrative duties.

Teacher leadership assignments often relegate teachers into the hierarchy of administration and alienated them from their peers. Teacher leadership is limited in its ability to facilitate effective mentoring, coaching, and motivating of peer teachers. Some researchers indicate that teacher leadership initiatives do little to support school level improvement (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, nd) and advance teachers careers toward administration. Teacher leadership roles have the proclivity to cause conflict among teacher leaders, administrators and other teachers (Little, 2003). The research demonstrated that teacher leadership can create work overload, stress, role ambiguity, and

role conflict for teacher leaders as they tried to maintain equilibrium between the new roles and the old roles (Smylie, et. al., nd). One teacher in a study by Little (2003), expressed apprehension in taking on teacher leadership roles; this teacher felt the additional duties and responsibilities coupled with the pressure to be a master teacher would be problematic in maintaining the work load and meeting the demands of her personal life. Another teacher in the study by Little (2003) expressed her feelings of isolation and alienation from her teaching peers as she took on more leadership roles. Teachers often viewed her more as an administrator and less as a peer.

Research suggests that teacher leaders strengthen the organization by helping other teachers embrace goals and understand changes (Harris, 2004). Schools that have high leadership capacity, foster environments that allow broad-based participation in the work of leadership by teachers and embrace a shared vision, inquiry, dialogue, reflection and focus on learning (Lambert, 2003). Today teacher leadership roles are centered on collective, task oriented and organizational approaches that allow people outside of formal positions of authority to lead (Lambert 2003). Since most administrative leadership programs have a prerequisite of leadership experience it is imperative that teachers who desire to be school leaders aggressively seek opportunities to assume leadership roles.

There are limitations in this scope of research on teacher leadership. There is evidence to support that many teachers who assume leadership roles pursue administration. Yet, there is insufficient evidence to determine if the teacher leadership roles impact the administrative role. While some studies indicate that teacher leadership roles are good sources of leadership experience and preparation (Harris, 2004; Lambert,

2003) there is no evidence to align teacher leadership and administrative leadership. In fact several studies indicate that the job tasks of teacher leaders are outside of the administrative arena (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Little, 2003). Further studies in this area are needed to systemically study the implementation of teacher leadership and the outcomes.

### **What Role does the Assistant Principalship Play in the Development of Effective Principals?**

The assistant principalship is the most common entry point to the principalship (Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary, & Donaldson, 2002). The assistant principalship is also the first step toward an administrative career at the school level (Daresh, 2002).

Historically, 80% or more of assistant principals aspire to be principal or beyond (Marshall, et al. 1992). Most researchers agree that the job tasks of the assistant principals are vastly different from that of the principal, but there is disagreement regarding the propensity of the assistant principalship's role as adequate preparation for the principalship (Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1995). Daresh (2002) categorized the job task of the assistant principal into two primary functions: (1) to assist the principal in carrying out mandated duties and (2) though not formally noted, to learn the job of the principal in preparation of fulfilling the role in the future. He further noted that the role of the assistant principal is necessary to learn administrative leadership skills; nevertheless the two jobs are distinctly different and tend to be disconnected.

Graham (1987) conducted a study in a small Canadian school district to determine if the assistant principalship is a useful training ground for the principalship. She surveyed eight assistant principals with varied backgrounds and years of experience. The

survey consisted of mainly open ended questions from 6 categories: (1) duties and responsibilities; (2) factors affecting the discharge of duties and responsibilities; (3) involvement in hiring, supervision, evaluation, disposition of teachers, and curriculum development; (4) perceptions of how professional colleagues regard their role; (5) suggestions for improving the role of the principalship; and (6) general attitudes about the assistant principalship (Graham, 1987). The findings revealed that the assistant principalship is viewed as the training ground for the principalship and the principal has the primary responsibility for training aspiring principals. As a result of this approach to preparation for the principalship there was no uniform set of training criteria and training experiences varied from school to school. Instructional leadership was considered the most important aspect of the principal's duties yet, the assistant principals in the study reported that they spent very little time on instructional leadership responsibilities. The assistant principals defined their job as one of helping the principal by assuming various task pertaining to the daily operation of the school such as discipline, business management, and student problems. The assumption of these tasks by the assistant principal allowed the principal to focus on instructional leadership (Graham, 1987). The assistant principals also felt that the job of assistant principal was not rewarding enough to be a career goal. All participants in the study believed that the assistant principalship is a stepping stone to the principalship. Yet, all the participants observed that the task they spent their day doing were not the task they would perform as a principal. In order to improve the quality of training for the principalship the assistant principals listed the following changes they would make when they became principals: give their assistant

principals more autonomy in decision making; more involvement in all aspects of instructional leadership; and less discipline to handle (Graham, 1987).

The value of the assistant principalship is significantly impacted by the orientation each individual brings to the position. Daresh (2002) and Marshall (1995) indentified six career orientations for those who serve as assistant principals. When examined these orientations create a clearer image of the assistant principalship and explain why this role does not always lead to the principalship. Based on these orientations the “career” assistant principal is the only one that does not desire to be a principal. This list of orientations also paints a bleak picture of the chances of an individual actually becoming a principal. Marshall, et al. (1992) noted that career timing and planning are critical factors that promote or inhibit mobility.

**Table 2: Assistant Principal Career Orientation**

<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Upwardly Mobile</b>	Has developed a useful network of colleagues in professional organizations, loyal to superiors, willing to take risk
<b>Career</b>	Does not wish to be a principal, has created a pleasant working environment with preferred task ,good relationship with superiors, takes pride in position
<b>Plateaued</b>	Wants to be a principal but has been overlooked several times, no chance for promotion exist, lacks sponsor and skills necessary for good human relations
<b>Shafted</b>	Fulfilled criteria for promotion but remains without a chance for promotion, plateaued and has lost sponsor often due to district changes or inappropriate placement
<b>Leaving</b>	Young enough to consider an alternative career, may have other skills that allows a career change
<b>Downwardly mobile</b>	Involuntary demotion due to reduction of staff, budgets, political mistakes, voluntarily requested due to health or desire to return to a job with preferred task

Adapted from Daresh, 2002; Marshall C. ,1995.

It is clear from this information that training and skills alone will not ensure that an individual advances the career ladder to principal. The elements involving strategic alignment of mentoring and advocacy on placement as an assistant principal are critical to the career of aspiring principals. There is disagreement among researchers regarding the assistant principalship and its subsequent role in the development of future principals; while some researchers see it as a career ladder step toward the principalship; others see it as a separate entity (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Marshall, et al.1992). Much of the literature regarding the assistant principalship reports the role, duties, and responsibilities as being vastly different from those of the principal. However, in most school districts it is a prerequisite for the job of principal.

According to research the contributions of the assistant principal to the most important aspect of the principals job; instructional leadership; is at best limited (Chan, et al. 2003). Yet, both research positions list discipline, human resource evaluation, monitoring school environment, planning and management, and social responsibilities as assistant principal task (Chan, et al. 2003; Marshall, et al.1992; Graham, 1987; Harvey, 1994). These same tasks are listed as principal duties and responsibilities (Coddling & Marc, 2002; Cotton, 2003; Crow G. , 2006; Daresh & Playko, 1989). There were prevalent limitations in this area of research. There tended to be a lack of literature that discusses the job task of the assistant principalship as being relative to the principalship.

## What Role does the Principal Play in Supporting the Development of Aspiring Principals?

A consistent theme within the literature recognizes the role of the principal in building leadership capacity in teachers and assistant principals with a goal of directing them to the principalship (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Gorton, 1987; Graham, 1987). The principal has chief control over the resources, training experiences, access to information, and opportunities for visibility of the aspiring leadership candidates; thus the relationship of leadership candidates to the principal is vitally important (Marshall, et al. 1992). In fact there is a suggested continuum of advisory relationships that assist leadership candidates in gaining access to the organization (Shapiro, Haseltine, and Rowe 1978 as cited by Daresh & Playko, 1992). The principal can serve in any of these roles at any given point in their career and the career of those they foster. The most common roles are mentor and advocate.

**Table 3: Continuum of Advisory Relationships**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Role</b>
<b>Peer Pal</b>	Someone at the same level as yourself, with whom you share information, strategies and mutual support for mutual benefit
<b>Guide</b>	Someone who can explain the system but is usually not in a position to campaign for the protégé
<b>Sponsor</b>	Someone less powerful than a patron (advocate) in promoting and shaping the career of a protégé
<b>Patron (Advocate)</b>	An influential person who uses his or her own power to help a protégé advance in his or her career
<b>Mentor</b>	An intensive paternalistic relationship in which an individual assumes the role of both teacher and advocate

Adapted from Daresh & Playko, 1992.

Many teachers who assume leadership roles and positions report that a supervisor encouraged them to become leaders. In a case study by Marshall, et al. (1992), one teacher reported that the assistant superintendent advised her to take on more supervisory

roles and to take administrative preparation courses; she quickly advanced the career ladder to department chair and later to assistant principal (Marshall, et al. 1992). In contrast another teacher in the case study reported being passed over on several occasions for administrative jobs. His principal recognized his ability to handle discipline well and to work well with students. However, many teachers felt he lacked interpersonal skills. He often complained about the promotion process. He was unable to acquire an advocate to support and promote him. As a result he did not advance the career ladder to a leadership position (Marshall, et al, 1992). This incident supports the belief of educators and researchers that administrative hopefuls who find the support of a mentor and an advocate have a better chance of moving into administration (Marshall, et al.1992; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

**Mentoring.** Effective principals are mentors by nature as they model behaviors and encourage others to reach their full potential. The job of the principal should incorporate the development of potential leaders by offering encouragement and support to tomorrow's principals (McCreary King, 1992). No one understands the scope of the principalship better than a principal therefore, the learning of someone aspiring to the position is best guided, nurtured, and supported by this wise, experienced and caring individual (Villani, 2006; Young, Sheets, & Knight, 2005). As a mentor the principal provides opportunities for growth, develops self confidence and motivates the leadership candidate to reach higher (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991).

Research shows that it is necessary for a principal candidate to have a mentor of some type who will offers informal support, training, and collegiality that assures the aspiring principal the visibility, advice and career direction needed to build a successful administrative career (Marshall, et al. 1992). The role of the assistant principal is recognized by some educators and researchers as a stepping stone to the principalship (Daresh, 2004; Hausman, et al. 2002). With this in mind the principal has a personal and professional responsibility to contribute to the growth and development of the assistant principal as a school leader (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991). Closely connected to this notion is the assertion that it is the primary responsibility of practicing principals is to recruit prospective leadership candidates. Principals are in a distinctive position that allows them to identify and foster leadership potential in candidates prior to formal leadership training. Principals who recruit prospective candidates develop close bonds that lend themselves to natural mentoring relationships. Through these relationships long term interaction, career guidance, and professional support create socialization to the role of leadership. Additionally, principals who persistently recruit candidates provide the greatest influence on teacher's decisions to become principals (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

Most assistant principals start their administrative career by working with principals who serve as their mentor. The majority of these relationships are not formalized and do not adhere to a standard set of criteria designed to foster the needed skills for the principalship. Each principal who serves as a mentor is left alone to determine what needs to be taught. Although there is merit to informal mentoring it is evident in the research that formal mentoring programs offer more structure and

standardization (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991). Formalized mentoring processes set guidelines for mentoring relationships, criteria to be explored and monitor the process to ensure that mentoring relationships are mutually enhancing (Bloom, et al., 2005). In a study conducted by Daresh (2004) regarding the perceptions of mentoring by mentoring protégés five benefits of mentoring were reported: (1) protégés reported feeling more confident about their professional competence; (2) learning to see daily translations of educational theory into daily practice; (3) increase in communication skills; (4) provided an opportunity to learn some of the tricks of the trade; (5) feeling of belonging in the new role. Boon's (1998) study of 24 pairs of mentor and protégés reported similar findings. Mentors perceived that they had attained a higher level of professional knowledge, increased collegial network, and higher level of job motivation, improved job competence, and supporting peer relationships. (Cited by Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001).

Mentoring relationships have become increasingly popular with 32 states implementing some form of mentoring program to assist school administrators in the past decade (Daresh, 2004). Although mentoring programs pose great promise, it is important to note that they are not without limitations. Researchers (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Daresh, 2004) list difficulties with sustaining focus, availability of resources to enable continuing program development, restriction of programs to limited populations, inadequate preparation of mentors and protégés, and the tendency of administrators to negate the importance of mentoring support systems as concerns that plague mentoring programs. Daresh (2004) also noted that leadership growth and development can be stifled by reliance on the mentor by the protégé.

Research clearly indicates that mentoring is an essential part of socialization and professional formation for administrative leadership. (Daresh, 2004; Villani, 2006; Wilmore, 2004). Formation was noted by Daresh (1990) almost two decades ago as a missing ingredient in administrator preparation. It appears that formation is still absent from administrative preparation programs leaving many administrators frustrated and confused as they assume formal leadership roles (Villani, 2006; Cotton, 2003). Mentoring programs are one way to answer the need for formation. Mentors help protégés achieve formation through reflective practice that brings about understanding of one's personal values and the role of formal leadership (Villani, 2006). In a public agenda survey conducted in 2001 fifty two percent of the principals surveyed responded that it was the mentoring and guidance of colleagues that provided the most valuable preparation for the principalship (Villani, 2006). Mentors provide feedback that will help sustain professional development over a period of time allowing it to become a process rather than an event (Daresh, 2004). Formation is an important aspect of the school administrator's professional development as it serves as the foundation of role socialization.

**Advocacy.** Principals who serve as advocates provide the next level of support for aspiring leadership candidates. The role of advocate is very different from the role of the mentor. Advocates promote candidates who have achieved formation and are consistently demonstrating high levels of readiness to assume the next level of leadership. When principals advocate for leadership candidates they are willing to challenge the beliefs of others and place their reputation on the line in support of a candidate. Advocates are often those seated in the political arena of the school district and well connected. They are able

to use their influence to promote a candidate through networking and sharing to their peers and superiors about the merits and abilities of their candidate. It is critical that school leadership candidates have an advocate. Advocacy is often the key that unlocks the door that leads to a principalship. As noted by Marshall, et al. (1992) and Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004), candidates who have an advocate have a better chance of advancing the career ladder into school leadership.

While there is a considerable amount of research on mentoring and coaching there is very little available regarding advocacy. Much of the research on mentoring and coaching tend to embed the role of advocacy as a function of the mentor (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Skrla, Erlandson, et al., 2001; Villani, 2006; Young, et al. 2005). Advocacy in educational leadership is an area that warrants further research.

### **What is being done to Improve Principal Preparation Programs and Practices?**

Principals and school leadership candidates need a combination of sufficient support and preparation designed in a manner that ensures optimal learning. University preparation programs are a catalyst to school leadership preparation. However, they are insufficient as a lone entity. In order to effectively deal with the realities of schools socialization must take place. Socialization is an area of growing interest for educator and researchers who recognize that knowledge acquisition, skill development, and practical experience require an orientation to the culture and norms of the profession.

**Socialization.** Professional socialization begins in university and college preparation programs with the initial preparation to take on the role of school principal and includes the theoretical knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to enact the role regardless of setting. This formal preparation is focused on indoctrination. It includes courses in management science and industrial psychology e.g. finances, organizational theory, law and leadership (Crow & Grogan, 2005). In addition many university preparation programs include some form of internship. These programs have been traditionally grounded in an extensive period of formal training followed by licensure with sporadic guidance and support provided for novice practitioners. Principals in the past were indoctrinated into the role under a “sink or swim” initiation. Often being handed a key, told where to go, and left to figure it out alone. Bloom, et al. (2005) found agreement among principals in a public agenda survey regarding the acquirement of skills and knowledge essential to the principalship; the greatest learning takes place on the job with pre-service programs among the least significant source of preparation.

There is a noteworthy body of literature that recognizes, classifies, and categorizes the expertise level vital to the principalship and discusses the deficiencies in formal university preparation. (Coddling & Marc, 2002; Cotton, 2003; Crow G. , 2006; Daniel, 2008; Daresh, 2002). This Research recognizes a need for some type of support system to help new principals chart a successful course as they navigate through the professional socialization hierarchy for principals. This hierarchy consists of five stages and the goal of support programs is to assist the novice principal with movement through stages 1 and 2 as quickly as possible (Villani 2006).

**Table 4: Principal Socialization Hierarchy**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Stage 1 Survival</b>	Individual experiences the shock of beginning leadership and has Trouble sorting it out. Personal concerns and professional insecurity are high. Tendency to overreact may be great.
<b>Stage 2 Control</b>	Primary concern is with setting priorities and getting on top of the situation. Behaviors are legitimated by positional power rather than personal power.
<b>Stage 3 Stability</b>	Frustrations become routinized, and management-related task are handled effectively and efficiently. Difficulties relating to facilitating change are accepted. Individual has achieved veteran status.
<b>Stage 4 Educational Leadership</b>	Primary focus is on curriculum and instruction. Confirmation comes from external sources. Behaviors are legitimated by personal power.
<b>Stage 5 Professional Actualization</b>	Confirmation comes from within. Focus is on attaining personal vision.

Adapted from Villani, 2006.

As states begin to review the increasing need for principals and the shortage of applicants prepared to meet the challenging demands during this era of reform and accountability, legislation is emerging to address preparation needs as they relate to the socialization hierarchy (Villani, 2006; Wilmore, 2004). This legislation is calling for induction programs that provide multiyear support for individual at the beginning of their career or new role that fosters professional enhancements, strengthens knowledge, skills, and the character of educational leaders (Villani, 2006; Wilmore, 2004; Young, et al. 2005). In addition, the learning environments and processes must be examine to ensure that program reform and development address the context of learning needed by the adult.

**Promising Practices.** Remarkable leadership preparation programs are those that engage leaders in professional, constructivist, timely, field- and inquiry based learning experiences within communities of learners and leaders (Szabo & Lambert, 2002). Educational leaders and policy makers are assessing the old paradigm of educational leadership preparation and recognizing that a continuum of professional development is needed beyond the initial formal preparation (Lashway, 2003). Current efforts to correct this deficit in principal preparation are mainly at the district level, but there is a growing interest in induction program requirements by various states (Lashway, 2003; Villani, 2006). In the early 1990's North Carolina, Mississippi and Iowa mandated policies to make basic changes in the structure and content of their states leadership preparation programs (Hale & Moorman, 2003). The reform efforts of these states resulted in higher quality preparation programs focused on leadership preparation and a process for ensuring that programs maintain high quality standards and relevant learning opportunities through ongoing monitoring. Programs are assessed against rigorous criteria that reflect the roles and responsibilities of today's administrators and require periodical reapplication for approval (Hale & Moorman, 2003).

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) has spent more than a decade studying the concerns surrounding educational leadership preparation and has been instrumental in developing a myriad of recommendations for leadership preparation programs improvements. In April 2001 SREB published a report, *Preparing a New Breed of School Principals: It's Time for Action*, proposing actions for every state and school

district to take in order to secure high quality principals for the future. Utilizing more than a decade of research and experience the SREB called for a global redesign of educational leadership programs using outlined strategies (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001).

**Table 5: SREB Global Redesign Strategies**

Strategy Number	Strategy
<b>One</b>	Single out high performers
<b>Two</b>	Recalibrate preparation programs
<b>Three</b>	Emphasize real world training
<b>Four</b>	Link Principal licensure to performance
<b>Five</b>	Move accomplished teachers into school leadership positions
<b>Six</b>	Use state academies to cultivate leadership teams in middle tier sch

Adapted from Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001.

The 6 strategies are aimed at helping states change how they identify, train, certify, and support school leaders in an effort to develop a pool of highly qualified candidates. Yet, the changes have yielded tenuous results. There are 16 states represented in the SREB and none of them have made tremendous progress in the selecting, screening and training of principals ready to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is not a shortage of certified principals, but a lack of principals qualified to meet the demands. The SREB reports that all states have large pools of candidates; Texas has more than 7,000, Georgia has 3,200 certified principals that do not currently hold the job. Georgia has 1,946 schools (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2003). The lack of qualified candidates gives rise to questions regarding the preparation practices. It is not enough to have good programs to prepare leaders they must also be implemented in a manner that supports adult learners by allowing them to take responsibility for the learning and be active participant's, thus allowing formation of the required skills and knowledge to take place (Daresh, 1990).

Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia are 6 SREB states that have heeded the call to raise the bar on preparation practices (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2003). These states are pioneering practices to tap potential leaders and provide the training and socialization needed to ensure they become effective leaders. Other SREB states such as Maryland, Louisiana, and Oklahoma have built effective systems for alternative licensure in educational leadership (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2003). Candidates must be recommended for these programs based on degree and experience requirements and pass an extensive on the job performance review. Ultimately each state must decide how to best meet the leadership needs of its schools. There is a momentous need to identify and replicate program structures that will ensure high quality administrators capable of effectively leading schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Davis, et al. 2007). It is equally important that these program structures create learning environments that are conducive to adult learner needs.

### **What are the components of effective preparation programs?**

Leadership preparation programs have been characterized as antiquated and out of touch with the realities of schooling (Daresh & Playko, 1992). Today's leaders are prepared in climates and cultures that fall short of providing the relevant skills necessary to lead 21<sup>st</sup> century schools (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). The results of a public agenda survey of hundreds of school principals and superintendants revealed that 69 percent of principals surveyed believed that traditional leadership preparation programs were inadequate (Bloom, et al. 2005; Lashway, 2003). These programs are designed to formally train administrative candidates to become school principals who can promote the development of good schools that provide learning opportunities for all students

(Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Lashway, 2003). Yet, the programs are often designed and implemented in a manner that does not support adult learners. It is a well documented fact that adult learners seek knowledge as it is needed, relevant to current issues and concerns, and provides practical experiences that require reflection (Merriam , 2001;Tough, 1979).

**Correlates of Effective Preparation Programs.** Several nationally recognized educational organizations have attempted to address leadership preparation through the development of national leadership standards. For the purposes of this Review two sets of standards will be address: The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). (See appendices A and B for complete details). The standards for the professional practice of school leadership established in 1996 by The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) have increasingly influenced the design of administrator preparation programs (Davis, et al. 2007; Skrla, Erlandson, et al., 2001). Many states (California, Delaware, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Connecticut) have developed their principal licensure programs around the ISLLC standards (Davis, et al. 2007). The purpose of the standards was to provide organized universal curriculum content and performance standards that could be used to implement preparation and professional development and licensure for principals (Coddling & Marc, 2002). These standards have helped to advance the field. However, a Meta analysis of research that examined the correlates of leadership and aligned them to the standards found they tended to underemphasize some of the key effective leadership practices (Davis, et al. 2007; Waters & Grubb, 2004).

These standards reflect the most current information and lessons learned regarding educational leadership practices over the past decade and relay the importance of policy standards to leadership (Educational Leadership Policy Standards:ISLLC 2008, 2008). The standards should be recognized as an attempt to identify and assess basic level knowledge and skill that is generic to administration and applicable to any administrative program (Coddling & Marc, 2002).

In 1990 the National Policy Board of Education Administration unveiled 21 Performance Domains that define exemplary leadership practice and in 1993 they presented the accompanying knowledge and skills supporting exemplary practice within the domains (Skrla, et al., 2001). Many in the field of education question whether or not such a vast amount of knowledge could be possessed by one individual and be assimilated for effective use (Coddling & Marc, 2002; Skrla, et al., 2001). Yet, there was vast agreement among principals and principal candidates that each of the 21 domains consist of valuable relevant knowledge and skills (Skrla, et al, 2001). Since schools and their respective needs are different leaders should be developed within the context; the 21 domains should serve as a tool to guide leadership program development (Skrla, et al, 2001).

Researchers believe that the preparation of principals must be thought of as a joint responsibility of theorist and practitioners in the field (Miller, Devin, & Shoop, 2007). The components of the programs in existence today include theoretical and practice based preparation (Lashway, 2003). Glasman and Glasman (1997) divided the theoretical components into two categories “traditional leadership theories” and “assumption theories”. Conventional school leadership preparation programs focus on traditional

leadership theories of situation, trait and behavior. These theories help to identify leadership characteristics and those predisposed to leadership (Glasman & Glasman, 1997). Assumption based theories were thrust into the forefront of leadership preparation within the last two decades and have become a part of current leadership programs (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Glasman & Glasman, 1997). Assumption based theories are practice based and centered on organizational concepts. The assumption theories of Bolman and Deal (1997) are divided into four structural assumptions; 1) structural frame, 2) human resources frame, 3) political frame, and 4) symbolic frame. Preparation in the structural framework to help leadership candidates develop the skills necessary to design and implement goal setting and problem solving strategies. The human resources framework instructs leaders in the development of relationships that advance the mission of the school. Political theory helps leaders develop coalitions and effectively negotiate when allocating limited resources, while the symbolic framework provides leaders with a sense of direction of the structure and activities within a school (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Glasman & Glasman, 1997). Current preparation programs that incorporate traditional and assumption based theories provide a strong foundation for future principals.

Murphy (2005) stated that knowledge should not be the center of preparation programs that seek to better prepare principals. For many years administrators have voiced concern regarding the nature of university preparation programs. A common complaint addresses the fact that university programs present knowledge about school administration but fail to help students understand how to translate the knowledge to practice (Murphy, 2005). The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEAA) criticized principal preparation programs in a number of areas

including their lack of providing curriculum that is relevant to the current demands of the job, lack of adequate clinical experiences, and lack of quality candidates due to weak admissions standards (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Levine, 2005). However, university preparation programs continue to focus on classroom content with common course offerings consisting of educational administration, school law, educational policy, leadership theory, personnel administration, organizational studies, supervision of instruction and finance (Glasman & Glasman, 1997). Some programs include an internship or a final project. Internships are supervised by experienced principals and provide an opportunity for candidates to apply classroom content to a real world setting (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Lashway, 2003). Leadership candidates express the importance of aspiring administrators experiencing the school administrators role directly through a real world model of learning by doing learn that allows them to apply theoretical learning (Murphy, 2005).

Research suggest that preparation programs with the most promise of adequately preparing effective leaders include a strong sense of purpose through collaborative efforts of universities, school district mentors, principal candidates, community leaders and government policy makers (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). In addition, effective leadership preparation programs are based on andragogical philosophy and emphasize clinical experiences that help candidates develop skills through real world practice (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

A noteworthy group of researchers (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Glasman & Glasman, 1997; Lashway, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Levine, 2005; Milstein & Krueger, 1997) contributed to defining the essential practices for leadership preparation

programs. Yet, there are still some questions regarding the effectiveness of preparation programs in the light of today's emergent needs and accountability requirements. Attention to the preparation of school leaders has increased during this time of heightened school accountability (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). A study by Levine (2005) raised the following questions regarding principal preparation: is the current curriculum relevant? Are adequate clinical experiences provided?; and Are admissions requirements rigorous enough? These questions are reflective of the litany of criticism in relation to the effectiveness of leadership preparation programs. Critics point out the disconnect from real-world complexities, weak and outdated knowledge, lack of depth in mentorships and internships, a lack of opportunity to test leadership skills in real situations, and admissions requirements that lack rigor as vital concerns (Davis, et al. 2007). Researchers at Sanford University and the Finance project conducted an in depth study of the unanswered questions driving the need for improving leadership preparation programs and attempted to move beyond the criticisms and offer effective solutions (Davis, et al. 2007). Among the key elements identified for promoting leadership program improvements was a readiness to change the current model of leadership

The literature supports the need for reform of traditional principal preparation programs that will provide relevant course content and field based practice for aspiring school principals. The research also favors induction, mentoring, and support programs for principal. Additional research is needed on current leadership practices and the perceptions of principals regarding their preparation experiences to further the body of knowledge.

## **Barriers to getting a Principal Position**

A 1999 report by Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds estimated that forty percent of the countries principals would be eligible to retire in 2005 (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). This report coupled with other similar predictions presented both a dilemma and opportunity for districts and states to identify and prepare diverse groups of principals who could lead schools into the next millennium. The Southern Regional Board of Education (SREB) accepted this challenge and commissioned studies on strategies that work in improving student achievement in low performing schools. This data was analyzed to determine the knowledge, skills, and preparation needs of future principals (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). The outcome of this study would have far reaching implications for school districts, states, and universities regarding the training and preparation of principals. In addition, some barriers would be erected that would prevent previously prepared principal candidates from meeting the highly qualified status and moving into the role. The requirements for highly effective future principals include; in depth knowledge of content fields and instructional knowledge, including strategies that motivate and engage students, exhaustive knowledge of local, state, and national standards as well as best practices in education, ability to set high standards for all students and teachers and maintain high levels of accountability for all, and create a school culture where faculty and staff understand that all students count and provide the maximum opportunity for all students to learn (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Kelley & Peterson, 2002). These new requirements entail a paradigm shift from the previous role of the principal that was management based. Future principals would not only need to possess managerial skills but master the future principal requirements as well.

School districts across the nation report significant shortages in the number of qualified candidates for the job of principal (Davis, et. al, 2007; Dipaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Furthermore, studies consistently acknowledge the same factors as barriers responsible for the shortages of highly qualified principal candidates. High levels of increased responsibility, low salaries and difficult working conditions, lack of professional development and support, and state and national accountability requirements are constantly emphasized (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Educational Research Services, 1998). In a succession planning survey educators indicated several deterrents for seeking principal positions. Among the most notable barriers were effect on family, time requirement, stress level of job, and the impact of societal ills on the role (Lacey, 2000). Accountability requirements, parental and community demands and lack of school funding were other noted barriers.

It has been suggested that the augmented requirements of principal preparation and licensure further discourage principal candidates from the role (Gronn, 2002). Yet, there are still those willing to serve who diligently arm themselves with the preparation requirements, individual district requirements, and attempt to navigate the politics surrounding the selection process who find that barriers still exist. These barriers are difficult to identify and even more difficult to overcome. Often the barriers at this level are equated to the lack of mentorship and advocacy (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). Others believe that the barrier exist in the science of Andragogy where the prepared

principal candidate has failed to assimilate the leadership lessons learned in the formal setting and as practical experience into reputable practice (Caffarella, 1993; Candy, 1991). Nevertheless, the result is the same, a licensed principal candidate who is unable to obtain a principal position.

### **Summary**

The outcry for formalized support mechanisms that maintain and support aspiring and practicing principals are becoming an audible siren that is finally being heard. This distress signal is materializing in the form of increased research and studies that identify the key skills needed; address issues encountered during the induction phase, and establish key components of successful support programs and the best practices for creating optimal learning environments for adults. The need for appropriate support programs for principals is not a new idea. It is one that has continued to expand with an unrelenting pace heightened by school reform measures and principal attrition. The role of today's principal has evolved into an active role of managing human resources, leading curriculum and instruction, developing programs, administration of finances, developing highly qualified teachers and other educational leaders, and involving key stake holders such as parents and community in the total school process (Coddling & Marc, 2002).

First time principals have no prior experiences or background knowledge to assist them as they assume this new role. The new principal is expected to take on the new role with the finesse of a seasoned veteran who is capable of handling the diversity of demands that they will encounter. When the initial euphoria of the appointment subsides, new principals are often left in doubt about their ability to fulfill the myriad of consistently emerging tasks required by the job. While school reform is the joint

responsibility of the state, the district, and the school staff, the greatest pressure for change is at the school level. At the school level, under the guidance of the principal, all of the resources and elements interact in ways that result in students meeting challenging standards (Cotton, 2003). It is at this level, that the leadership of the principal is the primary element in the success or failure of a school.

In the wake of The No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) 2001, that placed strict accountability measures upon schools and ultimately positioned the principal to be exclusively liable for the outcome, the principalship has received intense scrutiny. NCLB legislation is pivotal to the evolving research that has emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century regarding the principalship. This research recognizes that the role of the principal has undergone significant transitions over the past four decades. As new principals assume the vacated roles they will approach the job with new ideas, different perspectives, and limited experience. The challenge to the survival of education and individual schools during this era is immense. Highly skilled effective principals must be cultivated through carefully planned preparation programs that continue to support new principals as they assume the role. Hopkins-Thompson (2000) posed three questions regarding the development of a clear principal preparation path. The answers to her questions are grounded in the andragogical framework. This is where school leadership candidates will be armed with the necessary skills and knowledge, acquire an intuitive drive to seek answers and assume a reflective nature that allows them to self analyze and critic in a manner that promotes continuous growth and improvement as education evolves to meet the emergent needs of society.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHOD**

### **Overview**

A review of the literature has shown that researchers seek endlessly to create a composite of the skills, experiences, and preparation needed to become principals, yet there is no explanation to date to explain why some principal candidates do not advance to the role. The purpose of chapter three is to describe the methodology that will be utilized to explore the research purposes and questions in this study. This chapter includes the question that guides the study, research methodology, research design, participant selection, data collection, efforts to achieve reliability, and the role of the researcher. The findings of this study will be presented using portraiture and direct quotes from the participants to clarify and detail experiences.

### **Problems and Purposes of the Study**

As evidenced in the literature in Chapter Two, the skills and preparation needed to be a principal has been undoubtedly outlined. Despite a keen desire and continuous efforts toward advancement some principal candidates never move into the position. Additional research is needed to understand the factors that act as barriers to some principal candidate's advancement. This study addressed the problems pertaining to the lack of research on the factors that prevent principal candidates from advancing to the role of principal. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge from public school principal candidates regarding their perceptions of the factors that have prevented their advancement.

## **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research question:

What are the factors identified by licensed principal candidates that exemplify the barriers they perceive have prevented them from advancement to the role of principal?

## **Population and Sample**

A sample is a small subset of the population and should be representative of the whole. Qualitative researchers select participants that best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the population selected for this study is licensed principal candidates who despite various attempts have not advanced to a principal position.

Participants were purposefully selected which means the individuals selected were able to decisively inform an understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2007). The researcher used purposeful sampling drawing upon principal candidates who could describe and explain their perspectives on the factors that have prevented them from advancing to the role of principal, their experiences, and their perceived level of readiness to be school principals. The sample selected was also convenient. The participants were selected based on the accessibility and ease of data collection for the researcher.

There were specific criteria for the purposeful sampling of the participants in this study. The criteria for selection included; (1) willingness of a principal candidate to participate in the study, (2) the principal candidate is licensed to be a principal, (3) the principal candidate has been licensed for a minimum of three years, and (4) the principal candidate has interviewed for the job of principal a minimum of three times. Three

licensed principal candidates meeting the criteria were selected for this study. The use of three participants is based on the recommended guidelines for a good narrative study in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* by John Creswell (2007).

### **Design of Study**

Qualitative research is aimed at allowing the researcher to gain an understanding of a complex issue through talking directly with people, visiting the site and allowing them to share stories about their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). Since this study focused on exploring subjective phenomena a qualitative approach was selected as the best method to collect and analyze the data. The qualitative approach is derived from a phenomenological perspective which emphasizes the importance of understanding the meaning that events have for the individual person being studied (Patton 2002).

According to Patton (1991), “The goals of qualitative research are more concerned with understanding than with cause?” (p. 391). Patton (1991) explains,

“In this case, what is sought is an understanding of social phenomena from the perspective of the persons whose behavior is under study. The qualitative methodologies seek direct access to the lived experience of the human actor as he or she understands and deals with ongoing events. The goal is to describe and analyze the activities and reasoning persons use as they engage in organized social interaction ...A central objective of the qualitative approach is, therefore, to describe and understand the procedures by which persons create their own behavior and understand and deal with the behavior of others” (p.391).

The fundamental nature of this study focused on the concept of meaning and required the researcher to carefully examine situations and the context in which the situations were conveyed. The question is the central focus of phenomenological inquiry; seeking the real meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of those being studied (Patton, 2002). The researchers depictions must capture what was experienced and how it was experienced (Moustakas, 1999). Through the use of portraiture the

researcher unveiled the authentic story as perceived by those who experienced it. Portraiture allows the researcher to describe the story from a framework of strength not deficiency (Lightfoot, 1997). The researcher was able to capture the attention of the reader by portraying the stories of the principal candidates who have not been able to move into principal roles through portraiture. Through portraiture the researcher illuminated the hope, determination, and tenacious spirit of the principal candidates while getting at the root causes for the lack of advancement. Portraiture revealed the individual stories of each of the principal candidates and allowed the researcher to retell each story as it was told by the principal candidate.

### **Design of the Qualitative Instrument**

The research design of this study was portraiture using qualitative interviewing as a data collection method. Portraiture was specifically designed for the applied field of education by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot. It is a method of qualitative research that allows the researcher to merge artistic expression and scientific rigor to create a complete depiction. The portraitist records and interprets the perspectives and experiences of the people they are studying, documenting their voices, their vision, authority, knowledge and wisdom. (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. vx). Portraiture is unique in that the voice of the researcher is not silenced. The experiences and biases of the researcher acknowledge his or her presence and form the lens of inquiry through which the data is collected and analyzed (Dixon, Chapman, Hill, 2005). The traditional qualitative methods require the researcher to passively listen at the story and absorb the information without helping it to take shape and form. The portraitist listens for the story and is actively engaged in its creation (Welty, 1983). Being allowed to act upon hunches and interact with the research

subjects makes the researcher more effective than a detached observer (Le Compte, 1999). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) described the portraitist as an instrument of inquiry, an eye on perspective taking, an ear that discerns nuances, and a voice that speaks and offers insights. Portraiture seeks to engage the reader with the power of storytelling which enhances familiarity, understanding and empathy while connecting the reader to the subject. For this reason portraiture is deemed most appropriate as a research methodology for Educational Leadership. According to Mueller and Kendall (1989), Portraiture is an effective research methodology for conducting case study research in school systems because it combines the scientific perspective with the anecdotal, impressionistic perspective of the school practitioner.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), interviewing is the oldest art form, allowing the researcher to act as an artist adapting and modifying the techniques used to reflect their individual style. Interviewing is about obtaining the participants perspective and gaining an understanding of their lived experiences in the world in which they live and work (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Since the goal of this research is to inform an understanding of the meaning of the lived experiences the Responsive interviewing method was used. Responsive interviewing allows the researcher to achieve depth by investigating complex, multiple, overlapping issues while delving into the specific meaning, situations and history (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

### **Data Collection**

Responsive interviewing allowed the design of the interview to remain flexible. The questions were designed in a manner that did not influence the thinking of the participant but sought to find out what the participant was thinking. Patton (2002) refers

to this as “minimizing the imposition of predetermined responses” (p. 292). The construction of the questions is extremely important. A balance of main questions, follow-up questions and probes were designed. Main questions built on the background knowledge of the researcher and were constructed to elicit the understandings and experiences of the participants about the research problem. The main questions were broad enough that they could be easily answered without closing communication. Follow-up questions increased understanding and delved deeper into concepts. Probes help to manage the interview by signaling the interviewer to expand and give more detail on answers. The clarity of the questions was emphasized. It was important that questions were constructed in a concise manner and did not elicit dichotomous responses. Furthermore, part of the art of interviewing is to gently nudge in the right direction without biasing the participant (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman, 2004). These guidelines allowed the researcher to accommodate new information, unexpected situations and adapt to the actual experiences of the participant.

Individual questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from the sample. A questionnaire (Appendix C) and an interview protocol (Appendix D, Appendix E, & Appendix F) were developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions designed to get background information about gender, age, years of experience, degrees earned, principal licensure, and principal interviews from the participant. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that were divided into three interviews. The first interview sought information about the participant’s knowledge of what it takes to become a principal, the candidates understanding of the role the principal plays as a leader, and the candidates perceived level of preparedness to

assume the role. The second interview determined the key people that had influenced and assisted the participant on the journey to the principalship and the types of barriers that the participant had experienced. The third interview was more focused and utilized questions that were aimed at gathering information on patterns and structures that emerged in the first two interviews and warranted further clarification. This interview discovered how quickly the participant expected to advance, if there was a turning point that signaled a need to redirect efforts, the future outlook for the candidate as a principal, and next steps. Each participant was contacted via email (Appendix G) and invited to participate in the study. Following the email acceptance of the invitation to participate, each participant was emailed a statement of informed consent (Appendix H), the questionnaire, and the interview process. Participants were asked to review, complete and return to the researcher the questionnaire. When the documents had been returned the researcher contacted the participant and schedule the interview sessions.

### **Pilot Study**

Prior to conducting the interview the researcher conducted a pilot study of the interview protocol. The pilot study utilized two principal candidates that have been licensed for a minimum of three years and have interviewed for a minimum of three principal positions. They were requested to provide feedback regarding the clarity and succinctness of the questions on the interview protocol. Based on an analysis of the pilot study the questions were modified to provide clear understanding for the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed the data and highlighted statements and quotes that provided an understanding of the factors that prevented the principal candidate from

advancement. Next the researcher classified and coded the descriptions of events and happenings and identified themes and patterns among the data. This entailed an analysis of the core content of the interview to determine what was significant and involved identifying, categorizing, classifying, coding, and labeling the main data patterns (Patton, 2002). The researcher followed up by using the statements and themes to write descriptions of what the participants experienced and described the context in which the experiences occurred. Finally the researcher incorporated these descriptions into a composite narrative that shared what the participants experienced and how they experienced it.

The framework for capturing the fundamental nature of the information that was collected is created through the classification and coding of the data collected during the interview (Patton, 2002). Since coding effectiveness was critical to the potential substantive significance of this study, I performed my own transcription for the purpose of being more intimate with the data, and in so doing enhanced my ability to detect order within the data. I utilized *convergence* and *divergence* in order to develop a sound coding scheme. Convergence is determining what in the data fits together. This was accomplished by judging the categories based upon internal and external homogeneity. That is, how well the data in a category fit together (internal homogeneity), and how distinct or clear are the differences between categories (external homogeneity)? Next, I tested the category system for completeness by answering the following questions: 1) Do the categories appear to be consistent?; 2) Do the categories seem to comprise a whole system?; 3) Is the category set inclusive of all of the data?; 4) Does the system fit the data?; and 5) Has the data been properly fitted into the system? Evidence that the coding

scheme was inadequate was confirmed by a large number of items that could not be assigned to the categories or by a large number of overlapping data items. Alternatively, divergence was accomplished through the process of extension which allowed the researcher to build on the background information that was already known, bridging by making connections amid the different items, and surfacing through the suggesting of new information that should fit and the verification of its existence. Divergence also requires attentive examination of data that doesn't fit including unusual items that don't fit the central identified patterns (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative research emphasizes inductive analysis and the discovery of patterns, themes, and categories within the data places a paradigmatic emphasis on inductive analysis. This is in contrast to deductive analysis where the data is analyzed within the parameters of a predetermined lens or frame. However, analytic induction is a qualitative tool that begins with deduction and then the researcher looks at the data inductively. According to Patton (2002), qualitative analysis begins with deductive analysis because the researcher is examining the data within a framework that has been developed by someone else, within this process the researcher begins to look at the data afresh for undiscovered patterns and emergent understanding and the process becomes inductive.

### **Reliability**

There is no specific test available for ensuring that qualitative research is reliable and valid. However, there are suggested guidelines for judging the soundness of the research. For the purposes of this study the guidelines outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1985) were employed. These guidelines include credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Each was used to judge the soundness of the research.

Credibility requires the participant to certify that the data has been recorded accurately and there is an assumption that the study can be replicated. The researcher used two methods to achieve credibility; triangulation and member checking. In this study triangulation was achieved through the use of a variety of data gathering sources. Audio taped sessions, interview transcripts, and reflective postcards were used to amass data. Member checking is a critical element of credibility. It is during this process that each participant is given the opportunity to make corrections, additions and deletions to interview data before it is analyzed. The tapes were transcribed and copies given to the participant along with a member check form that will require the participant to verify the accuracy of the data (Appendix H).

Transferability affords other researchers the opportunity to generalize the findings of one study to similar circumstances. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985) the key to successful transferability lies in a thorough description of the setting, circumstances, participants and the procedure thus, providing enough information for comparison by other researchers. The use of multiple data sources, questionnaire and interviews and triangulating the results to see if they converge on the same results enhance the credibility of the results.

The research in this study investigated the principal candidate's experiences as they pertain to the quest for a principal position. These finding can be generalized to some education context. The use of a limited number of participants may not reflect all of the factors that act as barriers to advancement and may be limited to the time period of the study.

Confirmability serves as an extra cross-check of the overall logic and soundness of the study design. This is managed through an audit trail. All of the data sources including audio and video recordings and notes were labeled and will be maintained by the researcher in a locked cabinet for five years. At the conclusion of the five years the documents will be destroyed by shredding and incineration.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher took precautions to assure the anonymity and ethical treatment of participants. Complete disclosure was included in the initial questionnaire concerning the intent and purpose of the proposed study. Pseudo identities were assigned to each participant to assure complete anonymity. The participants had the opportunity to select the meeting location for interviews. In addition participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher followed all IRB requirements for the University of South Florida, Tampa for participants in the study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research the researcher gathers the data through observations, interviews, questionnaires, and the examination of documents. This makes the researcher the instrument and the center of the analytical process. It is important to understand the qualifications, experiences, and the viewpoint the researcher brings to the study (Patton, 1990). To improve the credibility and trustworthiness of this study the background and orientation of the researcher was discussed.

I am a fourth year doctoral student at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida in the Educational leadership and Policy Studies program. I received my Bachelor of Science Degree from Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia in Family and

Consumer Science. I am endorsed as a K-12 Vocational Education teacher. I earned a Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. I was a participant in several district level assistant principal training programs before advancing to the position. I also participated in the Pinellas County School District's principal preparation program that was required for endorsement as a School Principal.

I am currently employed by a large district in Florida as the principal at .a urban middle school. A role I have held for four years. I have been licensed to be a principal for nine years and interviewed for the position of principal a dozen times before advancing to the role. Prior to accepting the principal position I was an assistant principal for nine years. I occupied the position as assistant principal for five years at a high poverty school and four years in an affluent suburban school.

I was a middle school classroom teacher for thirteen years. I began my leadership journey during my second year of teaching when I entered the Educational Leadership master's degree program at Nova Southeastern University. At this time I also participated in school based and district level programs designed for those teachers interested in becoming school leaders. As a teacher I held leadership roles as department chair, committee chairs, and served on various district level committees. As a teacher the researcher worked at three different middle schools that encompassed the demographic and cultural span of the district.

My keen interest in the factors that prevent principal candidates from advancement to the role of principal stems from my personal journey towards the job and the barriers that I have faced. This research study will allow me to gain an understanding

of factors that act as barriers to principal candidates advancement and an understanding of how and if those barriers can be overcome by visiting other principals and discussing their experiences as they seek to become principals.

### **Summary**

Chapter three explains the methodology employed in this study of principal candidate's advancement barriers. The purpose of the research study and the questions are restated. It includes the identification of the population and sample, as well as descriptions of the type of research, instrumentation, data analysis, and effort to achieve reliability. Chapter three concludes with a timeline for completion of the study and a summary of the methodology.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

This study is guided by the research question that ask what are the factors identified by licensed principal candidates that exemplify the barriers they perceived to have prevented their advancement. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge from public school principal candidates regarding their perceptions of the factors that have prevented their advancement as a means of understanding the relationship between preparation, experiences, and other key factors that prepare candidates for the top leadership role at the school level.

The first section of this chapter presented the data analysis process. The second section presented portraits of each of the three principal candidates that were created using data generated from personal one to one interviews and the written reflection postcards. The third section presented the data generated from the candidate interviews and written reflection postcards in a descriptive narrative format. The final section of this chapter is a summary of the emergent understanding of the patterns, themes and categories as they relate to the research questions and the purpose of the study.

### **Interview**

As discussed in Chapter Three, the principal candidates were purposely selected because they had experienced the phenomenon and could decisively inform their perceived level of readiness to be principals along with the barriers that prevent them from advancement. A personal invitation was sent to seven selected principal candidates;

one Hispanic male, one African American male, three African American females, and two Caucasian females. Four of the seven principal candidates agreed to share their experiences; one African American male, two African American females, and one Caucasian female. Three principal candidates were selected to be a part of the study. However, prior to conducting the interview the African American male candidate was promoted to the role of principal and dropped out of the study. He was replaced by the fourth candidate who agreed to participate in the study; an African American female. Anonymity was important to the principal candidates because of their current roles in schools; therefore, an exemption of the informed consent was granted to the researcher. Each candidate who agreed to participate was sent a demographic questionnaire to fill out and two reflection postcards. One week after the demographic questionnaire was sent to the principal candidates they were contacted to schedule the time for the first interview session. Each candidate was allowed to choose the meeting location for each of the interviews.

The researcher spent one month with each principal candidate. Each principal candidate participated in a series of three interview sessions that occurred at one week intervals. The series of interviews was completed for one principal candidate before the next candidate was interviewed. The researcher followed the recommendations of Easton, McComish, and Greenberg (2000) and transcribed the interviews to avoid some of the pitfalls of transcriptions. This allowed the researcher to form an intimate relationship with the data and the research subject. The transcription was completed for each interview prior to the next interview in the series. According to Patton (2002) the time immediately following the interview is critical to the rigor and validity of qualitative

inquiry. Post interview time should be used for reflection, elaboration, clarification, and recording. This is also the beginning of the data analysis stage; while the data is fresh insights can emerge that might be lost without immediate review and transcription. The researcher continued reviewing the transcriptions in order to determine areas that needed probing and to develop an understanding of the candidates thought process prior to the next interview. Interviewing only one principal candidate at a time provided time for the researcher to develop an individual relationship with each candidate through the data.

### **Reflection Postcards**

The goal of qualitative interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind (Patton, 1991). Use of other artifacts provides a way to explore more deeply participant's perspectives on actions and events not observed (Hatch, 2002). To further enhance the data collected each candidate was asked to complete a series of eight reflection postcards. The post cards were designed to create reconstructions of past events and experiences of the principal candidates. Two postcards were given to each principal candidate with the demographic questionnaire and three given after the first and second interview. Postcards were collected at the beginning of each interview. The goal of the reflection postcards was to have the principal candidate reflect back on their experiences and recall thoughts and feeling that they had about various events that occurred along their journey. By allowing the principal candidates to complete the postcards at their leisure the resulting information was rich with detail and emotion.

Two of the principal candidates hand wrote their responses on the postcards. The handwritten cards displayed the reflective thought process. On these cards the principal candidates marked through and rewrote information, did not use the same writing tool which indicated added thoughts at a later time, and wrote outside of the designated writing area in the top, bottom and side margins of the postcard. The handwritten reflection postcards were spontaneous and personal. One of the principal candidates typed the reflection postcards. The type written postcards did not share information that was as revealing. The information was presented in a perfect, carefully written format that did not divulge the candidates thought process. The terminology used was not as descriptive. The typed cards were restrained of the emotion and feelings that seemed to be found in the hand written cards.

The reflection postcards provided additional insight that enhanced the development of a full picture of the candidate's perceptions and allowed the researcher to focus the principal candidates on single events that each had experienced. The reflection postcard responses were reported with the interview data. They were a source of rich descriptions and a self-revealing view of the principal candidate's experiences, actions and beliefs.

### **Data Analysis**

Hatch (2002), describes inductive data analysis as a search for patterns of meaning in data so that general statements about phenomena under investigation can be made. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe inductive analysis as a process to discover, develop and provisionally verify through systemic data collection and analysis. The analytical task for this study involved interpreting and making sense out of the interview

data and the written reflection postcards. The researcher used a combination of strategies that provided a sense of what the data meant, how it related across the themes, and how each of the pieces fit into the entire picture. The researcher organized the data, broke it up into manageable units, synthesized it, and searched for patterns.

The data analysis of the core content of the interview was conducted in three stages. The first stage was to identify domains based on semantic relationships discovered from the analysis. The second stage was to reduce the categories by identifying salient domains. The final stage was to categorize the interview data and select powerful excerpts.

### **Stage I: Identification of Domains**

All inductive analysis must start with a concrete sense of what is included in the data set beginning with the collection phase and is ongoing as new data is added (Hatch, 2002). The researcher started the data analysis by reading and rereading the data. After each interview session in the series of interviews the researcher transcribed the data and read through it to get a sense of what was included and to see if new insights were present. According to Hatch (2002), data should be read with a key question in mind. The researcher read through the data specifically looking for terms and statements that indicated a barrier to the candidate's advancement to the principalship. The researcher followed Spradley's (1979) model of using "included terms" and "cover terms" that were linked by a semantic relationship to develop the domains. Cover terms name the category and included terms name the members of the category (Spradley, 1979). Both Hatch (2002) and Spradley (1979) recommend selecting only one semantic relationship at a time and searching through the data for examples of that relationship.

The researcher selected *means to end*, (x is a... to Y) as the semantic relationship. The researcher searched through the data to find examples of items that represented barriers to the principalship. The identified terms were recorded. Once an included term (x) was associated with a cover term (y) the data was searched for other examples. The terms discovered were recorded and examined for the semantic relationship. A Semantic Relationship chart was created and the search continued for additional included terms that fit into the category (Table 6). Through this process twelve domains were identified.

**Table 6: Data Analysis Identification of Domains**  
**Domain: Lack of Supporting Roles**

Included Term	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
Mentor Advocate Principal Knowing someone high up	is a way to	Support principal candidates

Adapted from (Hatch, 2002).

**Stage II: Reduction**

The next stage was to reduce the twelve domains into salient categories. The domains that emerged from the data analysis were studied and decisions were made regarding the domains and categories that would be most important to the study. The researcher eliminated and used convergence to reduce the domains that only had one or two included terms. All of the domains were reviewed, including those with large quantities of included terms to determine if they were salient to the study. The data was reread for examples of experiences that the literature identified as integral preparation experiences for the principalship; 1) teacher leadership, 2) mentoring and advocacy, and 3) the assistant principalship. Using the driving question; what are the barriers preventing candidates from becoming a principal? The data was reread to see if the candidate's

answers indicated levels of experience in the included terms as validity of their readiness to assume principal roles and possible barriers for their lack of advancement. This process reduced the twelve domains to four clear domains; 1) lack of supporting roles, 2) nepotism and conflicts of interest in the School District, 3) lack of opportunity to showcase leadership qualities, and 4) lack of a clearly defined training program for principal candidates. Each domain included categories.

### **Stage III: Categorizing**

**Coding interview data.** In preparation for writing up the findings the researcher searched the interview data for compelling examples that would exemplify the identified domains and categories. This process was simplified by categorizing the interview data into the four domains using the cutting and sorting method detailed by Guba and Lincoln (1985). The researcher wrote the four categories on large manila envelopes. Each transcription of the interview was cut into sections that included the question and the answers. The cut out questions and answers were separated into the labeled envelopes based on the included terms. The researcher reread the interview strips that were placed in each envelop to determine if they were placed in the correct domain and redistributed them as needed. According to Hatch (2002) finding quotations that accurately and clearly convey your ideas is a final check on the analysis. Having too many good quotes to report is a sign that the findings are well supported.

**Selecting excerpts.** The researcher further reviewed the sorted quotations in each domain and assigned them to the categories. This step helped the researcher to organize thoughts so that they conveyed the findings to others. Statements were written to organize the researcher's thoughts about the categories as they related to the literature review and

the research question. Writing statements about the findings is an excellent way to ensure that what has been found can be communicated to others (Hatch, 2002). As the statements were refined they became assertions regarding the conceptual categories and the real meaning, structure and essence of the lived experiences conveyed through the interview and the written reflections of the principal candidates taking part in this study.

### **Portraitures**

The portraiture documents the voice, the vision, authority, knowledge and wisdom of each candidate as it pertained to navigating their course to the principalship (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This unique form of narrative allows the researchers voice to be heard through the interpretation of the perspectives and experiences of the principal candidates. The three individual portraiture profiles, which are presented in narrative form, are classified with pseudonyms as portraiture of: Shannon Price, Joanna Sommers, and Jennifer Jones. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of the participants in this study. The principal candidates who participated in this study are employed in visible roles in the public schools system and agreed to participate in this study only if anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

The portraitures were developed from the data collected at the interview, the reflection postcards, and the three face to face meetings with the principal candidates. The principal candidates were from a large school district in Florida. The candidate's age range was 41 to 56. They had been employed as educators for 19- 30 years. They had been assistant principals for 9-17 years and principal candidates for 3-10 years.

### **Portraiture of “Shannon Price”**

Shannon has been an assistant principal for nine years. She is a Caucasian female in the 40-45 age range. She has experience at the high school and the middle school level. She was a high school math teacher for 10 years, 6 of which were in another school district in Florida. She has a total of nineteen years as an educator. Shannon has worked in a variety of school settings that include both affluent and poverty populations. Shannon holds an Associate of Arts degree, a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics, a Master’s degree in educational leadership, and she is seeking a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at the time of this study.

Shannon was the first principal candidate interviewed for this study. The first meeting took place at a local Starbucks Café in the morning. Shannon was casually dressed in jeans and a tee-shirt. Shannon did not appear to be very comfortable; she twirled her hair in her fingers and avoided eye contact. The first interview did not go very well. Shannon answered the questions with short yes and no responses and attempts to solicit additional information did not yield satisfying results. This was of great concern to the researcher since the first interview consisted mainly of background questions pertaining to her career in education and her aspirations for school leadership. The interview should have lasted for an hour, but ended after a strained twenty minutes. After reviewing the data yielded from this interview, the researcher considered dropping Shannon from the study. Her answers to the questions did not divulge enough information and her reflection postcard answers were very short politically correct statements. A second interview session had already been scheduled, so the researcher decided to make another attempt at getting more meaningful data.

The second interview with Shannon was again conducted at a local Starbucks Café, but this time the meeting took place in the afternoon. Shannon was again dressed very casually in a velour sweat suit. She handed the researcher the two typed written reflection postcards. The postcards were very neat, but the responses again were short answers. She smiled, looked the researcher in the eye, and stated that she was ready to begin. The researcher asked Shannon some of the same background questions from the previous interview and received answers that were more detailed. As the researcher probed for additional information Shannon opened up and shared in more detail some of her thoughts and feelings. This interview lasted for fifty-five minutes. The third interview was conducted at the local library in the late afternoon. This session lasted for more than an hour and yielded answers with detail. She reported during the conversation that she is not a morning person. "I am not at my best in the morning." This statement was accepted as an explanation for the first interview session.

Shannon admits that education was not her intended career path. "When I first started college I was interested in Nursing. After attending college for two years and having 60 credits in math, I changed to math and math education." Shannon was teaching in a high school setting in a large city in Florida. She was actively involved in many aspects of the school and also served as the cheerleading coach. It was during her second year of teaching when her supervising assistant principal suggest that she go back to school to pursue a Masters in educational leadership. Shannon heeded her advice. "I went back to school to get my Masters degree, but not with the intention of going into administration. But just so that I would have it for a later time."

Shannon became an assistant principal in 2003. Her first assignment was at a small affluent middle school. At the end of the first year she was administratively transferred to a high school assistant principal position. "I have been moved three times. Not by choice and not because I was bad or there was an issue. It is just how it happened." The principal at the high school became Shannon's mentor. She entered the principal training program almost immediately with his support. "I had a principal who was a big supporter and it was at his suggestion that I apply, he was a big help and a mentor to me."

Shannon completed the requirements for principal licensure in 2007. She has been actively seeking a principalship since. She has gone on six interviews; four at the middle level and two at the high school level. "I have experience in both middle and high school so I feel I am a fit for the principal at these levels." Shannon indicates that she feels prepared for the next logical step in her career; a principalship. "I know I am qualified and I know I am capable so I really believe that I should have a job eventually because I know I can do it." She has had the opportunity to perform the typical tasks assigned to assistant principals. "I have had the opportunity to do almost every single job responsibility of an assistant principal. I cannot think of one that I haven't done at the middle or high school." She has remained knowledgeable through district level training opportunities, conferences, and college courses. "I continue to take classes at the university to stay abreast of new leadership policies and theories." She describes herself as a task oriented leader. "I think I am a task oriented leader with a mix of people skills. I am more task driven, data driven, organized, thorough, and complete."

Shannon stated that she prepares for interviews. “I meet with friends, superiors, and family to seek out interview tips and advice. I’ve read books and researched at great lengths on how to interview and make sure I am knowledgeable on all facets of administration and the specifics for the school at which I interview.” After her first interview Shannon stated that she was relieved. “I was relieved that it was over. I felt like at least I knew how the process worked and would be better prepared for the next one.” She engages in a self reflective process after her interviews. “I do a critical assessment of myself; I meet with the Associate Superintendent of Human Resources for feedback.” Shannon stated that receiving the feedback has been helpful. “I found it helpful; I wish I could have talked to more people. I would like to talk to more than just one person from the interview panel.” Shannon was allowed to see some of the comments that were written about her interview. She shared these: rambled discourse, nervous, talked too much on the questions and did not get to the point, got to the point and kept going. Some of the positive comments stated that she did not appear nervous and she was tech savvy.

Shannon stated that she is often not given a chance because of her appearance. “I don’t look the part to some people. People have made ugly, ugly, comments about me, my car, where I live, about how I look?” Shannon also indicated that her appearance may be hindering her advancement. “People have said you know you are small in stature and that is going to hurt you.” Shannon is very petite and looks youthful. “I do not wear glasses, but I bought them just for the interview and put my hair back because I thought it would make me look older and more mature. I am vertically challenged so, I wore high heels.” Shannon attributes much of her lack of success in securing a position to her not

knowing anyone in authority who could advocate for her. “I was disappointed and discouraged and I felt like if I don’t know anyone I’ll never get anywhere.” Shannon also indicated that she is very selective in choosing interview opportunities. “One thing that might have hurt me is that I do not interview for every position that comes open. People might say I am picky or selective.” Shannon plans to continue interviewing at least until her husband retires. “After my husband retires in a few years and I don’t have much longer to work, I will stop trying. However, for now she is committed to continuing on her journey. “I am going to keep interviewing and looking for posted positions.”

### **Portraiture of “Joanna Sommers”**

Joanna was the second candidate interviewed. She was working summer school and agreed to meet after school. The meeting took place at a Panera Bread restaurant over lunch. She greeted the researcher warmly and expressed interest in the study. She asked several questions about the purpose of the study and how it would help potential principal candidates like her. She also shared some information about her research. Subsequent interview sessions with Joanna were in the same location during the same time frame. Joanna was always very personable and began the interview with several questions about the research or general conversation about the researcher’s job as a principal. She put the researcher at ease and made it easy to ask questions and probe for additional information.

Joanna is an African American female in the 50 to 56 age range. She has been a middle school assistant principal for 15 years. She has worked in the school district for thirty years. She has experience in a variety of school settings including inner city, magnet schools, and fundamental school programs. “I have worked with all income levels, in all settings; tradition, magnet, fundamental, at risk, dropout, and vocational.”

She has a Bachelor of Science degree in vocational education and science education. She has a Master of Science degree in guidance counseling and administration and supervision. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree. She completed the requirements for principal licensure in 2005. She has interviewed seven times for the principalship; four at the middle level, one at the high school level, and two at an alternative school. She attempted to interview for an elementary school principalship, but was denied the opportunity to interview due to lack of experience at that level. "I was not allowed to interview for the elementary position because I did not have elementary experience."

I noticed that Joanna was professionally dressed for each of our meetings. She expressed pride in her appearance. "Physical appearance is one of the least likely reasons for me not to be hired." She spoke with confidence in a strong clear voice. She indicated that her intended career path had been a college professor. "I originally wanted to be a university professor." Her path towards the principal role was not deliberate. Joanna wanted to become a registrar but the prerequisites for the job required more education, training, and experience than she had at the time. "I came to the public school system with the intent of becoming a registrar and then they changed the requirement of the job to include a prerequisite of an assistant principal. Once I became an assistant principal I decided to seek the principal position."

Joanna describes herself as a democratic leader. "My leadership style is democratic. I like to be instructional, I think I am facilitative. I also believe that policy has an important part to play in the way we deal with issues. In the process of that we need to keep in mind that we need to treat people the way we want to be treated and we need to provide people with opportunities to do what they do best." Joanna's journey

toward the principalship has not been easy. She was denied access to the district level principal training program for several years. “I applied four times to the principal training program and I was denied three times.” She attributes her difficulty to lack of experience and lack of support. “The first time I probably did not have enough experience, the second and third time I think my supervising principal...was not going to provide opportunities for me.” In addition Joanna indicated that she has not had the best opportunities to learn and perform all the task associated with school leadership. “My advancement has been hindered by not being allowed opportunities to rotate through the different job responsibilities within the school by a couple of principals at different school assignments.” Joanna has compensated for her lack of opportunities at the school level by gaining a vast amount of experience in out of school educational programs and state government education programs that she incorporated into school leadership. “I have worked with other agencies during the summer and grant programs. I have served as director and coordinator...worked with teachers, managed the budget, transportation, curriculum, parent contacts, planned orientations, and scheduled.”

Joanna has learned a great deal from her numerous interviews. “I have learned that it is important to convey my knowledge of what going on at the school currently, what assets I have to offer the school, how I involve stakeholders, how my leadership will promote best practices, how I will work as a team player and my knowledge of curriculum and policy.” Joanna further expressed her readiness to assume the role. “I am capable of fulfilling the role related to each of the aforementioned factors and would provide a fit for the job. Experience means something.” In addition Joanna has received mainly positive feedback from her interviews. “With the exception of my last interview

all of the comments have been positive and promising. Sometimes I have provided more information than was needed to answer the questions. For my last interview feedback I was told that I did not score in the top half of the interviewees and that I might need to look for another option. Plan B.” Joanna does not find the feedback that she receives from her interviews helpful, particularly the feedback from her last interview. “I don’t think it pinpointed my weakness in my interview. It was not given with pointers on what I need to do. It was given as a recommendation and that is not what I intend to do.” Joanna feels that she adequately prepares herself for interviews. “I review the experiences that have prepared me for the principalship, the district strategic direction, the school improvement plan for the school; I speak with employees at the school, and review the schools data, get an overview of the schools program and curriculum. I also make sure I am versed regarding district initiatives.” Understanding where she is falling short has been difficult. “Some people say my skills are dated.”

Joanna indicated that she has enough practical experience to work in any environment. “I think I have more than enough experience and probably more than most folks who have ever worked in the district.” Joanna has received numerous reasons from colleagues regarding her lack of success in acquiring a principalship. “I’ve heard that some colleagues think I am desperate...because I am still interviewing, that the district is not going to hire someone my age, that I don’t interview well, that I can’t compete with a group of assistant principals that view themselves as “the up and coming” leaders, that my day is coming (for a principalship), that I should just try to be the best assistant principal and not worry about a principalship.” However, Joanna cannot overlook her lack of connections to key district personnel as a potential reason for her lack of success.

“I’m not connected with the right people”, she informed me through our conversations and her written reflections. “I do not know any of the region superintendents; at least any that would advocate for me.” Joanna also discussed an incident in her career that may have mired her progress. “I had a career derailment in one school setting and after that occurred I was placed in a school setting where it was obvious that the principal did not appreciate having someone placed in their school and as a result the person was demeaning for a number of years. And as long as he was well thought of I couldn’t get anyone to listen to me. When he later had a career derailment and people started to realize what kind of person he was doors started to open for me.”

For now Joanna plans to continue interviewing and gaining school based experience. “I am going to continue to interview and I am vying to get some of those experiences that I either have not had in a long time or never had at all.” Joanna also has an alternative career plan just in case the principalship remains elusive. “I would like to finish my doctoral program and then I am going to start looking at higher education as a place of employment.”

### **Portraiture of “Jennifer Jones”**

Jennifer was the last candidate interviewed. She was also the candidate that replaced the male who dropped out of the study. Jennifer met for the interview after she finished her work day at her summer school location. She selected Panera Bread as a meeting location. At this first meeting she explained her desire to participate in the study as a way of giving back to those who had helped her as she was seeking her doctoral degree. She chatted about her passage through the doctoral program and offered

encouragement to the researcher. Jennifer's interview sessions lasted longer than the sessions with the other two principal candidates. Each session with Jennifer was approximately two hours. She was very easy to talk to and openly shared her thoughts, feelings, and opinions.

Jennifer is an African American in the 40-48 age range. She is a veteran administrator with 12 years of experience as an assistant principal and has worked in the same district for twenty six years. She was impeccably well groomed; wearing a linen summer suit, hair, and nails were flawless. She had a polished, confident look and spoke with authority and wisdom. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education, a Master of Science in educational leadership, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership.

Jennifer started college as an engineering major. She tutored at Upward Bound during the school year and worked the month long summer program. Through this experience teaching became her passion. She changed her major to elementary education and decided that teaching would be her career path. "What started out as just a job to make some extra money changed my life. I was hooked on teaching. I knew that I wanted to spend my life working with students." During her first year of teaching a colleague told her about a master's degree program for teachers. "I have always had a love for learning so I decided to enroll in the educational leadership program during my second year of teaching." Jennifer was enjoying teaching, but, thought about her future. "I was having a great time teaching and the kids were fabulous, but I knew the day would come when I would want other opportunities to work with students on a global level."

Jennifer had a very supportive principal who encouraged and mentored her. In fact she credits her principal for guiding her through the process to become an assistant principal and getting her first assistant principal job. “My principal became my mentor and guided me through the final stages to become an assistant principal. He helped me get my first job by advocating to other principals on my behalf. When others did not believe in me he did.” Jennifer became an assistant principal in 1998. Once she became an assistant principal Jennifer once again found a mentor and supporter in her principal. She was able to enter the principal training program at the end of her second year as an assistant principal. “My principal was very supportive and encouraging. He constantly told me what a good job I was doing. He told me I was principal material.” Jennifer shared with me that at the time she was extremely confident in her skills and abilities. “At the time I thought I was truly a high performing assistant principal with a bright future ahead.” She was confident in her skills and training. “I have had the opportunity to perform every job that is assigned to an assistant principal, including being the principal’s designee.”

When Jennifer graduated from the principal training program in 2002 she was certain that she would be promoted immediately. “I thought I would sail right through and end up as a principal immediately.” She was surprised by her lack of success in obtaining a principal position. “I was told repeatedly by one of the area superintendents that I would advance immediately once I met the requirements. Eight years later and dozens of interviews have sapped my confidence and my belief in my abilities.” Jennifer admits that she did not do well on her first interview. “My first interview was bad. I did not know what to expect and as a result I gave very short answers that lacked detail and

depth.” The feedback Jennifer has received was helpful in the beginning. “Statements like, good answers, but lack of emotion and energy in the speech pattern were helpful at first, but after awhile became meaningless because there was not definitive things that needed to be changed.” However, she expressed confidence in the fact that she possesses all the necessary skills and consistently demonstrates her ability in her current job. “I feel my leadership skills and my experiences have prepared me to be successful as a principal. I have the passion and the heart for the job.”

Jennifer is a self proclaimed servant leader. “I lead by serving among those I am leading. I would never ask others to do what I would not do. I am also a visionary who is good at seeing what is to come and preparing those I lead for the future.” Jennifer clearly expressed her belief in her level of readiness and ability to be an effective principal. She contributes her lack of success in acquiring a position to being relatively unknown. “Lack of connections at the district level and the lack of an advocate to showcase what I do each day has been the biggest barrier to my advancement. I know my principals advocated for me as I was seeking the assistant principalship. In hindsight I believe this made the difference.” Jennifer does acknowledge the loss of her mentor when she graduated from the principal training program. “When one of the other assistant principals became politically connected my principal began showing favoritism towards him. The assignments and support that I had previously been given was now given to this individual.”

Jennifer has not become a more viable candidate as a result of her doctoral degree. “I thought the doctoral degree would set me apart, but in some ways it has alienated me from being a viable candidate. People seem to turn away from you because

of this degree.” Jennifer is still interested in becoming a principal, but is no longer sure it is in reach. When she shared this statement with me I saw her poise and confidence waiver for the first time during our three sessions. “The jury is still out on whether they have a place they can use me. The key is whether I give up before they find the right place.” Regardless of what happens with the acquisition of a principalship Jennifer has a plan and remains optimistic. “I’m seeking part time employment in higher education and completing the mandatory years in the district that I have before I can retire. I am open to whatever possibilities life throws my way.

### **Themes**

The data presented are arranged in a format which presented the themes that evolved from the interviews and reflection postcards. Assertions were developed within the framework of the emergent themes. The assertions are formed from the data and the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The assertions link the specific expressions found in the data to abstract constructs; professional definitions found in the literature, values, theoretical orientations and personal experiences.

#### **Theme 1: Lack of Supporting Roles**

**Assertion 1:** *Mentors and advocates are powerful influences to career advancement opportunities in the principal candidates’ progression from teacher to assistant principal, and principal trainee.*

The role of a mentor and an advocate is an important factor when attempting to climb the career ladder towards school leadership. The mentor provides encouragement and support as the aspiring principal is developing the critical skills necessary to become a principal. Research shows that it is necessary for a principal candidate to have a mentor

of some type who offers informal support, training, and collegiality that assures the aspiring principal the visibility, advice and career direction needed to build a successful administrative career (Marshall, et al. 1992).

The principal candidates in this study reported having a mentor or advocate at some time during the early stages of their leadership journey. These mentors and advocates identified the candidate's leadership potential, supported and encouraged their education and advancement to assistant principalships, and promoted their entry into the principal training program. Research clearly indicates that mentoring is an essential part of socialization and professional formation for administrative leadership. (Daresh, 2004; Villani, 2006; Wilmore, 2004).

The responses supplied by the principal candidates specified the critical role of mentors in helping them to move forward. While mentoring can vary from informal conversations to formal career development programs, all three candidates suggested that time and access to their school administrators was essential to their leadership development. Shannon noted that early in her teaching career she “worked really close with [her] assistant principal,” while Jennifer “received additional duties and responsibilities in preparation for becoming a leader.” Both Shannon and Jennifer shared that their administrators encouraged formal preparation for school leadership. Importantly, their school administrators' support extended to placement. Shannon highlighted her principal's support for placement in the principal training program: “it was at his suggestion that I apply and it was a big help.” Jennifer stressed the importance of advocacy noting that her principal “advocated to other principals for my placement as an assistant principal.” While both candidates pointed out that their principals

“supported” and “guided” them, Jennifer described her principal’s support as both “words and actions.” She also reported that his encouragement and praise was ongoing.

Shannon and Jennifer also indicated that they had multiple mentors at different stages of their leadership journey. They were mentored from the teacher to assistant principal phase and they were supported by a different school administrator as they sought to enter the principal training program. Joanna denoted the importance of a mentor and the fact that she had such a relationship at one time. She did not elaborate on the role of the mentor or how she benefited from the relationship.

“Shannon”: My second year of teaching I worked really close with my assistant principal and it was at her suggestion that I went back to school to get my masters degree.

The first time I applied to the principal training program I was accepted. I had a principal that was a big supporter and it was at his suggestion that I apply and it was a big help. He was a mentor.

“Joanna”: It helps to have an advocate and a mentor. I had one but, unfortunately, it was limited to the term of the period we were paired and it did not extend beyond that period.

“Jennifer”: When I arrived at my new school the principal was young and open. She invited anyone interested in leadership to be a part of a training group that received additional duties and responsibilities in preparation for becoming a leader. She was my first mentor. The next year I was selected to become a part of the faculty to open a brand new middle school with ground breaking concepts in education. My new principal became my mentor and guided me on the final stage of the journey toward an assistant principalship. He acted as an advocate for me. When others did not believe in me he did. His words and actions supported me. He advocated to other principals for my placement as an assistant principal. Even to this day he sends me cards and notes encouraging and applauding me, telling me how proud he is of my accomplishments.

My principal was very supportive and encouraging. He constantly told me what a good job I was doing. He told me I was principal material.

**Assertion 2:** *Regardless of the preparation and experience of the principal candidates the absence of a mentor or an advocate is a barrier to advancement to the role of principal.*

Research supports the notion that candidates who have an advocate have a better chance of advancing the career ladder into school leadership (Browne-Ferrigno, et al. 2004; Marshall, et al.1992). Advocates are willing to challenge the beliefs of others and place their reputation on the line in support of a candidate. Advocates often hold positions of power and have great influence over decisions within the school district. They are able to use their influence to promote a candidate through networking and sharing to their peers and superiors about the merits and abilities of their candidate. It is critical that school leadership candidates have an advocate.

The proper training and experience is essential for advancement to the principalship. Most principal candidates receive similar preparation and training. Those with mentors had an intermediary that provided a means of access to the position. Jennifer noted “what sets us apart is having someone who is promoting you.” There was general consensus among the principal candidates that rapid advancement was the result of having a mentor. Both Jennifer and Joanna indicated that those who gained access to the position quickly are those who were “connected,” However, the acquisition of advanced degrees, high levels of training, and numerous years of experience has not been enough to accelerate the careers of these principal candidates seeking the role of the principal.

Each principal candidate emphasized their level of readiness. Shannon and Joanna indicated that they had completed all the necessary training and have the necessary experience. Each principal candidate stressed that they did not currently have a mentor or an advocate to help them transition from the role of assistant principal to the role of principal and cited it as a reason for their lack of advancement. “I don’t have someone to speak for me to the higher ups” stated Shannon. Joanna expressed concern that she doesn’t “have a mentor speaking on my behalf.” Shannon shared this sentiment, “I have completed all of the training and have the experiences necessary but, I do not have anyone to speak for me to the higher ups. I think if I knew someone who could promote me to the higher ups I would get a job.”

“Joanna”: I think that a good ol’ boy network exists and if you don’t have a mentor that is well respected or you don’t have a mentor at all it limits your chances to get a position.

I know that I am qualified to do the job. The only reason that I have not been successful in getting promoted is that I do not have a mentor speaking on my behalf. The people who have been able to get principalships quickly are those who are connected. You have to know someone with power to move through the ranks.  
(Postcard)

I think that not having a mentor is a big barrier. Not having an insider.

“Jennifer”: I have completed the requirements for the training program and I have interviewed numerous times, received feedback and still wait. I think it is because I am not connected and I don’t know anyone who will speak on my behalf.  
(Postcard)

For the most part everyone who applies for the principalship has the same type of training and has met the same qualifications. What sets us apart is having someone who is promoting you. I think it is essential to have someone who is speaking on your behalf. Most of the principals that I know who got promoted quickly had some type of connection; someone who spoke on their behalf and advocated for their advancement.  
(Postcard)

**Assertion 3:** *The principal has the greatest influence on the advancement opportunities of principal candidates.*

A consistent theme within the literature recognizes the role of the principal in building leadership capacity in teachers and assistant principals with a goal of directing them to the principalship (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Gorton, 1987; Graham, 1987). The principal has chief control over the resources, training experiences, access to information, and opportunities for visibility of the aspiring leadership candidates; thus the relationship of leadership candidates to the principal is vitally important (Marshall, et al.1992).

Each of the principal candidates indicated that the principal has some measure of control over the types of assignments and opportunities that are given to the assistant principal. Exposure to the myriad of responsibilities of the assistant principal is critical to the aspiring leader. Principals who are committed to grooming leaders from within the organization operate from a framework that promotes expanding knowledge and practical experience. “The principal assigns the task and controls the opportunities to attend conferences and get exposure”, noted Jennifer. Joanna emphasized the power the principals wields to advance or to hinder the career of an aspiring principal, “if the principal does not have a policy of rotating different jobs the opportunity to learn some of

the requirements first hand may not be provided.” Principals who are not willing to rotate job responsibilities and provide access for all aspiring principal candidates to practical experiences hinder the aspirants’ progress. Joanna has been “hindered by principals not allowing me to rotate through the different jobs.”

Although each of the principal candidates credited previous principals for supporting them as they were moving through the ranks they were elusive in their discussion about the role of their current principal. “I am not sure my current principal sees my leadership ability and is supporting me,” stated Shannon. While Joanna thinks her current principal has faith in her leadership ability and is providing some opportunities to learn things she had previously been denied. Jennifer referred to the current principal in unequivocal terms regarding the level of sponsorship provided. “I believe my current principal sees my potential and advocates for me on a small scale.” She pointed out that her principal “is someone who is trying to further her own career and would not miss an opportunity to showcase herself leaving little time for her to showcase me.” Jennifer alluded to her principal sharing work that she has done with superiors and taking credit for it.

"Shannon": I think my principal plays a role.... I have heard people say things about their principal hindering them. I have never had that but, I have seen where principals have been huge advocates and have opened doors for people that would not normally have been opened.  
(Postcard)

I am not sure if my current principal sees my leadership ability and is supporting me. I think she does. I know she has to because I can tell by what she gives me to do as far as responsibilities.

“Joanna”:  
I think the supervising principal has some control over the types of responsibilities you have in a school and if they don’t have a policy of rotating different jobs the opportunity to learn some of the requirements first hand may not be provided. In addition to that I think those individual who have mentors who are in high positions and have influence have a better opportunity to be selected.

I have been hindered by principals by not being allowed the opportunity to rotate through different jobs responsibilities within the school. It happened a couple of times.

I think my current principal sees my leadership ability. Sometimes when she is working on projects she allows me to sit in and see what she is doing and provide information from the meetings and trainings that principals participate in and with a plan to give me some responsibilities that have been locked in with another assistant principal.

“Jennifer”:  
The candidate’s current principal has the most influence. The principal assigns the task and controls the opportunities to attend conferences and get exposure.

I believe my principal sees my potential and advocates for me on a small scale. She is someone who is trying to further her own career and would not miss an opportunity to showcase herself leaving little time for her to showcase me. Sometimes I believe she even shares my work as her own.

**Assertion 4:** *Gaining access to the principalship requires candidates to make themselves known to district level leaders.*

The principal candidates in this study clearly identified themselves as highly qualified to assume the principal role. They had completed the required training, attempted to showcase their abilities in their present positions, and made their intentions known to top level administration. They considered themselves experienced in the classroom and as assistant principals, well educated, holding advance degrees, and remaining on the cutting edge of current best practices through in-service training, staff

development, and national conference attendance. They have completed the required training to become principals and are currently going through the interview process. Yet, despite having followed the protocols navigating through the maze and finding the path that leads to the principalship has been challenging.

Principal hopefuls in the district where these candidates are employed are encouraged to meet with the regional superintendents to discuss their career aspirations. Shannon denoted that “the district level administrator plays a role and you have to make yourself known to them, which is sometimes difficult to do.” She was unsuccessful in setting up a meeting with the superintendant stating that “she did not return my calls.” Both Joanna and Jennifer revealed that one such meeting obliterated the hope they had for advancement. The meeting with the superintendant “basically left me feeling like I had no place in the district beyond my current role.” He told me that “if you don’t get a position in a few years after you are ready consider moving to another district,” Jennifer disclosed. Joanna also remembered that her “meeting was not very positive.”

The principal candidates also shared examples of meetings that were positive and appeared productive at the time. The person they met with had encouraged them and remained optimistic that the future held advancement. Shannon met with the region superintendent to discuss her career aspirations and her willingness to do whatever it took to advance. The meeting was positive, “she gave me hope.” Joanna recalled being recognized by the superintendent on a visit to her school and being told to contact several people regarding her career aspirations. The meeting was very positive and Joanna stated,

“It gave me hope.” Reflecting on the conversation with the regional superintendant and her lack of success in acquiring a position, Shannon expressed concern with the genuineness of the statements made by her superiors in the meetings. “I do not know if it [her statements] was genuine.”

“Shannon”: I met with the associate superintendent. The superintendent did not return my calls. I discussed my career aspirations, how I could fulfill them, what I was doing wrong, what I needed to do better and just really let her know that I was open to whatever path I needed to take. She gave me hope. I do not know if she was genuine.

I think the district level administrator plays a role and you have to make yourself known to them, which is sometimes difficult to do. (Postcard)

“Joanna”: I met with the associate superintendent to discuss potential openings. The meeting was not very positive in terms of giving me hope.

I had an informal meeting with the superintendent when she was visiting my school. She suggested that I meet with someone in Human Resources. This meeting was very positive and gave me hope because I was recognized and approached by someone in power.

“Jennifer”: When I met with the superintendent he basically left me feeling like I had no place in the district beyond my current role. He told me that if I did not get a position in a few years after you are ready that you might want to consider moving to another district. He told me that he had done that in his quest to move forward. He told me to contact him the next time I interviewed and he would look into it. After his comments I did not bother to contact him.

The regional superintendent afforded me more hope. Talking with her one on one gave her the chance to know me on a different level and to see beyond her initial perception of me. After talking with me she noted that she had never gotten from my interviews what she got from our one on one conversation. She commented positively on my leadership skills.

## **Theme 2: Nepotism and Conflicts of Interest within the District**

**Assertion 5:** *When nepotism and conflicts of interest are present in the work place it generates overwhelming perceptions of favoritism.*

For the purposes of this study nepotism is defined as the preferential treatment by those in power to family and friends. Nepotists appoint family and friends to positions within the organization with little regard to anything but the relationship. It is a subtle form of discrimination in the work place that produces dissatisfied workers, who are less motivated, and destroys natural systems of promotion. Miller and LeBreton-Miller (2006) point out that a bias in favor of family members or friends risks alienating other talented candidates interested in the position. The principal candidates in this study cited examples of nepotism and conflicts of interest within the school district they are employed. Shannon emphasized that personal relationships within the organization is “the biggest obstacle.” She further indicated the advantage that some have because of “who they know” A fact she stated “is hard to overcome.” There was consistency among the candidates in their discussion of incidents and examples of promotions that were allegedly related to personal relationships with higher ups. Joanna recalled an incident in which “the other candidate who got the position had been recruited for the interviews and coached by an insider.”

Each of the principal candidates discussed an incident in which they were not promoted in favor of a candidate with connections to higher level leadership. “I applied for a position that was perfect for me” explained Jennifer as she described a meeting she held with a principal prior to interviewing for the position she was vacating. “She essentially blew me off. She made it known when I arrived that she had forgotten about

our appointment and that she only had five minutes to spare. When her assistant principal was selected for the job I knew it was a set up.” In addition Jennifer cited an example of candidates pre-selected for promotions. “The school where the superintendent’s children attended was not opened up for interviews. The superintendent selected and promoted a candidate who had never been a principal.” Joanna and Jennifer also noted times when they were told that they were the best candidate for a position by an insider. ”I was told by an individual on the interview team that I had the best interview”, stated Joanna. Jennifer was “told by one of the selection committee members in confidence that [she] was the top candidate.” None of the principal candidates produce evidence for these accusations; however the appearance of favoritism has eroded morale, aroused suspicion, and destroyed trust levels within the district.

“Shannon”: The biggest obstacle that is hard to overcome is the fact that people have an advantage because of who they know. It is one of the things that you can’t change. People know people, people have relationships with different people and you can’t really deny that and you can’t change the fact that those people mentor and advocate for the people they know.

Even though there was more than one position that I was qualified for people with fewer qualifications got the jobs because they knew people. That’s how the cookie crumbles when you are not connected.

I think I did not get the job because somebody was better friends with someone else who was higher and that is my personal opinion. The person who got the job did not meet the qualifications to interview according to the districts policies.

“Joanna” I have been qualified for all of the jobs that I applied for. I was working at one school as an assistant principal when I applied for the principal position I know that the person who got the job was a top level pick.  
(Postcard)

I think the other candidate who got the position had been recruited for the interviews and coached by an insider. I was told by an individual on the interview team that I had the best interview session and that the person who was selected interviewed poorly. The person who was selected shared with colleagues that they interviewed poorly and he also told others that he had the job before the interviews took place.

(Postcard)

“Jennifer”: I applied for a position that was perfect for me. I was a member of the community, active in the community, and very knowledgeable about the school. I did not get the job. The interview was a farce, because the successor had already been preselected by the principal. When I met with the principal prior to the interview she essentially blew me off. She made it known when I arrived that she had forgotten about our appointment and that she only had five minutes to spare. When her assistant principal was selected for the job I knew it was a set up. She was obviously the principal’s selection and she was also connected to the superintendent. I was even informed by a member of the interview team that I had a great interview and was the top candidate.

(Postcard)

Some of the jobs that come open are never posted. Placements are made. I understand the placement process when it is a lateral move but, I do not understand when it involves a promotion. The school where the superintendent’s children attended was not opened up for interviews when the principal was promoted. The superintendent selected and promoted a candidate who had never been a principal and recently graduated from the principal training program. No interview, nothing, just gave the job to her.

(Postcard)

The person who got the job had already been preselected. I gave a good interview and was told by one of the selection committee members in confidence that I was the top candidate.

Relationships and networks with those in power give some candidates an advantage.

(Postcard)

When one of the other assistant principals became politically connected my principal began showing favoritism towards him. He got the best assignments, training opportunities, and travel to national conferences. It was clearly an unfair system that spring up because of the connection.

**Assertion 6:** *In settings where nepotism and conflicts of interest are present interviews are not seen as a way of hiring and promoting the best qualified applicant.*

The interview is the prospective candidate's opportunity to sell themselves to a potential employer. Interviews are supposed to provide a chance for candidates to detail their level of expertise, share their experience, and demonstrate that they are the best candidate for a position. Interviews are traditionally structured in a manner that is consistent, with defined questions, and a regimented process that is replicated for each candidate vying for the advertised position. If the circumstances of the interview are not constant it will produce advantages for some candidates. A conflict of interest exists in interviews when an employee's loyalties or actions become divided between the employer's interests and the personal desire to help another person. According to the principal candidates in this study the interview process in the district where they work is not always consistent and fair. "Most candidates have an equal opportunity to get an interview", noted Joanna, but not "all candidates have an equal opportunity to get hired." The participants in this study alluded to district practices that provide selected candidates with insider information that ensure that they have an advantage over candidates. Joanna expressed her belief "that sometimes the candidate of choice is given the questions in advance" and "coached prior to the interview to make sure they are going to answer the questions in the manner the committee is seeking the answers." Jennifer concurred, adding that "the questions are often designed to accentuate the qualities of the preselected candidate." Pre-selection of candidates was noted by the study participants as an issue. Joanna indicated that "due to connections some people are courted for certain positions." Shannon indicated that she "thinks people are handpicked" and Jennifer noted that the

candidate was “preselected” for one interview. The principal candidates revealed occurrences of appointments, pre-selection, and changes in policy and requirements as patterns seen in the district. Shannon shared an example of not being allowed to interview because she had not been a graduate of the principal leadership program for two years. A policy she said was instituted by the regional superintendent as “a way to eliminate some of the competition and get her picks placed.”

“Shannon”: I think they all have an equal opportunity to interview. I have only been denied an interview once when the regional superintendent changed the rules for several openings and denied interviews to candidates who had not been out of the principal training program for two years. I think this was a way to eliminate some of the competition and get her picks placed.

Some positions they post and interview for knowing full well that they know who they are placing.....And some positions they just place. Some people have been on the interview process for multiple times, for multiple years, and not gotten a job yet. Other people have not had to do that process at all and been placed. That has been more and more prevalent lately.....Lately, it has been people who are just barely qualified; had to still be in the training program or not even in it yet. They are connected to someone in power who opens the door for them to just walk in.

I am qualified and experienced but, you can't overlook the fact that sometimes people are pre-selected and I have heard that multiple times from multiple people.

I think that people have been handpicked.

“Joanna”: Probably most candidates have an equal opportunity to get an interview. I do not think all candidates have an equal opportunity to get hired.

I would like to see a system that is not so tainted with pre-appointments.

I think in some cases due to connections some people are courted for certain positions and that they are even coached prior to the interview to make sure they are going to answer the questions in the manner the committee is seeking the answers.  
(Postcard)

I think there are some moles in the organization where people are mentored by individuals who have direct contact with the interview committees who determine that positions warrant the placement of a person before an interview has been granted.

I felt I was suited for the position. I think the candidate who got the position had been recruited for the interview and coached by an insider.  
(Postcard)

He (the interview candidate) told people he had the job before the interview took place.  
(Postcard)

“Jennifer”: Some candidates appear to have an advantage. Some get the first job they interview for, some are appointed, some interview multiple times before they are selected and some never get selected at all. The only thing that appears to set them apart is who they know.  
(Postcard)

I would prefer the district made placements if they already know who they want. Preparing for and interviewing is a stressful task and I think it is cruel to have people go through this process if the interviewers truly are not open to the best candidate based on the interview.  
(Postcard)

I also believe that the questions are often designed to accentuate the qualities of the preselected candidate. I also believe that sometimes the candidate of choice is given the questions in advance.  
(Postcard)

I was a good fit for the school with community connections, but I never had a fair chance. The interview was a facade. The person had already been pre-selected.  
(Post card)

**Assertion 7:** *When rumors in the work place accurately predicted promotions employees believed in a pre-selection process.*

A rumor is an unconfirmed message that is passed from one person to another. In the unconfirmed state it is easy to shrug off a rumor as gossip and scuttlebutt. When the accuracy of the rumors become more than uncanny coincidences they erode employee trust. Rumors exist in most environments. However, when the rumors are confirmed and become a reliable source of information it creates a system of distrust and suspicion. When they exist in the work place they create systems of mistrust.

There is an active rumor mill in the district where the principal candidates work that accurately predicts the candidates who will fill vacancies. The principal candidates indicated an accuracy range between 35% and 95%. Both Shannon and Joanna believe that confidential information is being shared that feed the rumor mill and the level of accuracy. “Evidently there must be a leak at the top,” acknowledged Shannon. Joanna noted, “When people in confidential positions get information they need to keep it confidential and stop feeding the gossip mill.” Jennifer shared how difficult it is to remain hopeful for a promotion when the rumors exist before the interview takes place. The level of confidence in the rumor mill is so high that Jennifer is “waiting to hear a rumor” as a confirmation that she is being promoted.

“Shannon”: Predictions are accurate 75% of the time. Evidently there must be a leak at the top. There has to be because I am not privileged to know who is interviewing, even when it is a position that I am interviewing to acquire. I know people who are interviewing for the same position or another position and they know the names of everyone else who is interviewing. Someone is giving out the information.

“Joanna”: When people in confidential positions get information they need to keep it confidential and stop feeding the gossip mill.

There is a rumor mill in the district that accurately predicts promotions to specific jobs 35% to 55% of the time.

Usually when there is a rumor that a particular person has the job it usually pans out.

I was told by a member of the interview team that I had the best interview and the person who got the job interviewed poorly.  
(Postcard)

“Jennifer”: The rumor mill predictions are 95% accurate. I think positions are promised before the interview. In fact, in the current top administration candidates getting jobs are always friends or related to friends.

I try to remain optimistic, but sometimes there is already a rumor about who is going to get the job and since they are usually true it is hard to hold on to hope. I am waiting to hear a rumor about me.

I was told by one of the interviewers in confidence that I had the best interview.  
(Post Card)

### **Theme 3: Lack of Opportunities to Showcase Leadership Qualities**

**Assertion 8:** *The job of the assistant principal is isolated to the school level limiting opportunities to convey and demonstrate leadership ability beyond the school setting.*

The job task of the assistant principals is to help the principal by assuming various tasks pertaining to the daily operation of the school such as discipline, business management, and student problems. Historically, 80% or more of assistant principals aspire to be principals or beyond (Marshall, et al.1992). The value of the assistant principalship is significantly impacted by the orientation each individual brings to the position.

Each of the principal candidates indicated that the lack of opportunities to “showcase” their skills and leadership ability was a barrier. Shannon noted, “If you don’t have an opportunity to showcase your skills nobody will know who you are and what you can do.” Jennifer pointed out that “the assistant principal’s job is an isolated position” and “most of the work is done behind the scenes.” The accomplishments, skills and daily performance cannot be seen by a universal audience beyond the school setting. The assistant principalship does not provide an opportunity for those outside of the school setting to see what a candidate does on a daily basis. “I think it is real important that people know what you can do so that you can build a reputation for yourself” noted Shannon. Creating a well known reputation could be the difference in getting a position. Interview committees may not be “able to see the connection between the skills someone has and their ability to do the job”, cited Joanna.

“Shannon”: If you don’t have an opportunity to showcase your skills nobody will know who you are and what you can do. I think it is real important that people know what you can do so that you can build a reputation for yourself. I have not had the opportunity to do this in every school.

I am qualified, I am experienced and I think that I have tried to make myself known.

“Joanna”: I think it is important for every candidate to showcase their skills. I am not sure that every interview committee is able to see the connection between the skills someone has and their ability to do the job.

“Jennifer”: It is critically important for those who must navigate the path based on merit alone to have an opportunity to showcase their skills and abilities.

The assistant principal's job is an isolated position. The assistant principal works behind the scene in relationship to district exposure. In order to showcase their skills the principal candidate would have to do something earth shattering or have a principal that advocates and sells the assistant principal to those in power. (Postcard)

**Assertion 9:** *Interviews provide a narrow snapshot of a candidate's leadership ability and other factors should be included when making principal placements.*

The identification of future school leaders begins with a clear understanding of the characteristics that are to be sought in those who would be effective. With the characteristics and behaviors of effective principals outlined the task of identifying those who demonstrate these qualities should be easy. Cotton (2003) describes 26 principal behaviors that effective principals demonstrate. She grouped the behaviors into five categories: (1) establishing a clear focus on student learning; (2) interactions and relationships; (3) school culture; (4) instruction; and (5) accountability. The duties of the principal are myriad; no one can be expected to have firsthand experience of all of the issues of the principalship without having been a principal.

Most interviews for principalships are behavior based. The skills needed to do the job have been identified and questions relating to those skills have been constructed. The interviewer evaluates each question based on the candidate's evidence of past experience, skill, and knowledge of each question topic. However, the interview is often a common barrier to successful identification of principal candidates due to poor interview skills, lack of clear and concise examples when answering questions, lack of background knowledge of the candidate, and a lack of training for the interviewer to understand what is being sought by the questions.

In the district where the principal candidates in this study are employed behavior based interviews are utilized. The questions are created to obtain information about the candidate in relation to the needs of the school. The interviewers did not receive information on the candidates such as a resume that would provide background knowledge of the candidate and detail the candidate's path to leadership or personal references that would speak to the candidates demonstrated ability. The interviewers were given some general information before the interview started on what type of answer the question required. The principal candidates in this study complained about the interview process not providing enough opportunity to showcase all of the leadership skills that they have. Common concerns were the lack of consideration of other information beyond the interview such as evaluation data, experience, training, and success in a variety of school settings. Shannon indicated that "none of the questions ask you to tell about yourself or what makes you unique. So, I don't know how those people would have known anything about me." The principal candidates expressed concern that the interview alone was the basis for deciding who gets a job. "If they talked to other people that I have worked with, consider my evaluations, talk to my principal, my team members, my teachers, and even parents; they should consider all stakeholders because just like some people aren't good test takers, some people are not good interviewees," noted Shannon. The candidate's responses indicated that those who have the best interview skills are often the ones chosen for the job without regard to any other indicators of preparedness to assume the role and best fit for the position advertised. Jennifer stressed that "some people give great interviews, but what they say and what they later do in the position does not add up".

“Shannon”: I will tell you in my last interview the first question, in fact none of the questions asked you to tell about yourself or what makes you unique. So, I don’t know how those people would have known anything about me.

I have leadership qualities that the interview did not reveal. If they talked to other people that I have worked with, consider my evaluations, talk to my principal, my team members, my teachers, and even parents; they should consider all stakeholders because just like some people aren’t good test takers, some people are not good interviewees.

If they wanted (to know everything that a person has done) they have the resume’ they have our training records, they know our education level, just by what we are being paid, so all that and they ask you not to send any documents when you apply and when you come to the interview.

“Joanna”: Other factors that should be considered along with the interview are experience, community involvement, educational training outside of what the district has provided and your motivation for applying for the position to begin with because some people strictly do it for the money.

If the questions were more global as to where your skills could be used instead of making it totally germane to the school you are applying to. I think that sometimes those qualities would come out in the interview process.

“Jennifer”: The interview is a small snapshot of what a candidate can do. Some people give great interviews, but what they say and what they later do in the position does not add up. Others who don’t interview as well are often great at carrying out the functions of the job.

Other factors that should be considered are experience, success in a variety of school settings, needs of the school they are interviewing, what the candidate can offer the school, use of best practices, and appraisals.

It might be necessary for the interview committee members to have some one on one conversation with the candidate, perhaps conduct a site visit to the current job setting.

(Postcard)

I wanted to make sure that no matter what the outcome, I left the interview with no regrets and with the interviewers seeing my merit.

(Postcard)

#### **Theme 4: Lack of a Well Defined Training Program for Principal Candidates**

**Assertion 10:** *Principal training programs are not designed in a manner that assists principal candidates with developing the critical skills necessary for success as principals.*

The processes for developing the skills needed to be a successful principal include formal and practical training. Leadership preparation programs have been characterized as antiquated and out of touch with the realities of schooling (Daresh & Playko, 1992). Today's leaders are prepared in climates and cultures that fall short of providing the relevant skills necessary to lead 21<sup>st</sup> century schools (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). These programs are designed to formally train administrative candidates to become school principals who can promote the development of good schools that provide learning opportunities for all students (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Lashway, 2003). Yet, the programs are often designed and implemented in a manner that does not support adult learners. It is a well documented fact that adult learners seek knowledge as it is needed, relevant to current issues and concerns, and provides practical experiences that require reflection (Merriam, 2001; Tough, 1979).

In the district where these principal candidates are employed, principal hopefuls are required to attend a two year training program in order to gain eligibility to become a principal. The principal candidates articulated mixed feelings regarding the validity of the program and how well it actually prepared candidates to be principals. "I don't think the program is going to necessarily make you a leader if you do not already have something", proclaimed Shannon. Joanna questioned the necessity of the program since some candidates were not "required to participate in the districts principal training program."

Shannon agreed that the program was not “detrimental.” When asked to identify the five critical skills needed by principals each principal candidate responded differently. Shannon indicated that being “a systems thinker” was important while Joanna asserts that “people skills are very important.” When asked if these skills were a focus of the principal training program the candidate’s answers were vague in regards to what was specifically addressed. “They try to incorporate all of the facets of being a leader in the program” acknowledge Shannon. However, Joanna did not “think that all of the critical skills were incorporated into the program.” These different responses were indicative of the study participant’s perceptions of the training that the principal candidates received in preparation for the principalship.

The district two year training program identified the critical skills that principal candidates need to be successful as abstract concepts that could be decided by each individual cohort group based on the group’s thoughts and beliefs about what was important. Jennifer contends that “the program was not organized in a particular way. It was basically developed by each individual group.” Candidates with no practical experience in the role of principal can only surmise what skills are needed and essential to becoming a principal. The principal candidates indicated that there was no core foundation to the program. “I have to say what was taught was vague and possibly irrelevant”, proclaimed Jennifer. She further, indicated “that I am not sure what particular skills the program fostered and how the skills taught related to being a principal.”

“Shannon”: They try to incorporate all of the facets of being a leader in the program, but I don’t know that they are specific like some of the other training we receive. I think they try to concentrate on your strengths but, I am not sure there is much work on your weaknesses. There is no formal instrument survey on you to determine your strengths and your weaknesses. So they do not concentrate on some of your weaknesses.

The program was not individualized for each candidate as much as I would have like it to be, but you do get to work on some individual projects.

I don’t think the program is going to necessarily make you a leader if you do not already have something in you because everybody is an individual. Some people took two years to do the program and some people didn’t even do the program and made it. And some people only completed a year of it and also became principals so I wouldn’t say it was detrimental.

(The five essential skills) being a team player, being collaborative with your administrative team and faculty; being able to collect and analyze data and then use that data to make decisions, be savvy with your school improvement plan ..... Be a systems thinker.

”Joanna”: I don’t think that all of the critical skills were incorporated into the program at the time that I went through it. I am sure not sure what opportunities are provided in the program now. I think the process has become more difficult for people to get in but I am not sure the needs are being met to prepare a person for the job.

(The five essentials skills are) people skills are very important, you need to have a history of service and service in the perspective of doing jobs that prepare you for the principalship, budget...curriculum...working with stakeholders, be able to handle discipline, have a lifelong learning philosophy for yourself and for your students, be able to provide training to teachers.....work with data to determine trends within the school and be able to figure out what your needs are and how to meet them.

I was also disappointed because the person was new to the district and wasn’t required to participate in the districts principal training program.

(Postcard)

“Jennifer”: When I attended the program it was not organized in a particular way. It was basically developed by each individual group based on what that group felt they wanted to learn. I am not sure what particular skills the program fostered and how the skills taught related to being a principal.

When I was in the program I have to say what was taught was vague and possibly irrelevant.

The five essential skills are vision, wisdom, flexibility, initiative and passion.

**Assertion 11:** *The best way to develop the necessary leadership skills to be a principal is through practical hands on experiences, but all candidates are not given the same opportunity to obtain those experiences.*

Remarkable leadership preparation programs are those that engage leaders in professional, constructivist, timely, field and inquiry based learning experiences within communities of learners and leaders (Szabo & Lambert, 2002). It is not enough to have good programs to prepare leaders they must also be implemented in a manner that supports adult learners by allowing them to take responsibility for the learning and be active participant's, thus allowing formation of the required skills and knowledge to take place (Daresh, 1990). The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEAA) criticized principal preparation programs in a number of areas including their lack of providing curriculum that is relevant to the current demands of the job, lack of adequate clinical experiences, and lack of quality candidates due to weak admissions standards (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Levine, 2005). Some programs include an internship or a final project. Internships are supervised by experienced principals and

provide an opportunity for candidates to apply classroom content to a real world setting (Lashway, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Leadership candidates expressed the importance of aspiring administrators experiencing the school administrator's role directly through a real world model of learning that allows them to apply theoretical learning (Murphy, 2005).

In the district where these principal candidates are employed the two year principal training program does not provide a principal internship. The candidates must acquire and practice the skills needed in the current work environment. The study participants indicated that they are not given sufficient opportunities to learn and practice the skills needed for success. Shannon indicated that she "had the opportunity to perform every task in middle and high school" but, the opportunities to learn the skills were a result of "working at multiple sites." Joanna indicated that she has been "hindered by not be allowed opportunities to rotate through the different job responsibilities within the school." Something she says "has happened more than once." The disparity in the principal candidate's opportunities to learn the different task and skill demonstrate the propensity for some candidates to not get the opportunity to obtain the necessary experiences within the work environment. This may require them to seek opportunities to develop "the necessary skills by going back to school and through collaboration with community agencies "noted Joanna.

"Shannon": I have had the opportunity to perform every task in middle and high school but, it did not occur at every school. I acquired the opportunity by working at multiple sites.

I have had the opportunity to develop my skill, but not in all the schools where I worked.

”Joanna”:  
Some folks are developing the necessary skills by going back to school and some are doing it through collaboration with community agencies.

I have been hindered by not be allowed opportunities to rotate through the different job responsibilities within the school. It has happened more than once.

Jennifer”:  
The best skill development comes from actually being able to participate in hands on experiences. The more experiences, trainings, and task assigned the better exposure the candidate will have to a wealth of skills that actually become the wisdom needed to navigate the principalship.

I have had the opportunity to perform every job that is assigned to an assistant principal, be the principal’s designee, attend training, serve on committees and develop various programs. These opportunities came as a result of my willingness to transfer to a different school setting. If I had stayed in the same setting it would not have happened. I worked at one school for 5 years as an assistant principal and I was never assigned the task of curriculum and scheduling because the person assigned was given a life term on the job.  
(Postcard)

**Assertion 12:** *It is important that principal candidates maintain their viability as candidates through continued professional development opportunities.*

The principal candidates must be adept at self-direction and self management and seize opportunities to develop leadership skills. Successful principals are typically action oriented, self-motivated, and possess an intrinsic drive to succeed. Tough (1979), confirmed through his research that many adults can and do learn primarily through their own initiative. Leadership development is a self directed process that requires candidates to take initiatives that demonstrate their readiness to lead and their desire to engage in leadership enhancing opportunities. Principal candidates who fail to gain access to the principal position shortly after completing the requirements have the daunting task of keeping skills sharp and remaining a plausible candidate. “I try to continue my

education, participate in professional development, and stay on top of things”

acknowledged Shannon. Joanna took “the opportunity to go back to school and work on [her] doctoral degree.” Joanna discussed her “work with other agencies and grant programs during the summer” as a means of developing and practicing leadership skills.

“Shannon”: I try to continue my education, participate in professional development, and stay on top of things. Like for instance the new computer system. I’ve done all the training and tried to stay on top of that. Everything that comes out I try to be the first one to do it or at least get it done so that I keep myself viable.

“Joanna”: I have taken the opportunity to go back to school and work on my doctoral degree. I am also collaborating with community agencies. I work with other agencies and grant programs during the summer. I have served as director and coordinator of some of those programs where I have worked with teachers and managed the budget, transportation, curriculum, parent contacts, orientation, and scheduling.

“Jennifer”: I work very hard, stay on the cutting edge of best practices. I completed my doctoral degree.

## **Summary**

The path leading to the principalship has yet to be clearly defined. There have been attempts by various researchers to define the skills needed to be a successful principal, but the process to acquire those skills still varies widely. It is not known why some principal hopefuls navigate to the position with relative ease while others appear to languish in the pool. It has become apparent that the job requirements of the principal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are dictated by pressure for school improvement and high stake testing and accountability. Principals who assume positions must be prepared to do a task that is evolving and changing daily. It is clear that training and skills alone will not ensure that an individual advances the career ladder to principal.

The elements involving strategic alignment of mentoring and advocacy and placement as an assistant principal are critical to the career of aspiring principals. Principal candidates are responsible for initiating the process towards the principalship, but much of what happens in route is beyond their control. It is important that principal candidates understand and make the necessary adjustment to perceptions about who they are and what they do. Those who fail to make the necessary corrections often have trouble advancing to the next level. Daresh (2002) and Marshall (1995) identified six career orientations for those who serve as assistant principals. Two of the orientations, plateaued and shafted fit the profiles of the principal candidates in this study. Plateaued candidates want to be principals, but have been overlooked several times, appear to have no chance of promotion, and lack a mentor/advocate and the skills necessary for good human relations. Shafted candidates have fulfilled the criteria for promotion, but appear to remain without a chance for promotion and have lost the support of a mentor/advocate through district changes or placements.

The requirements of 21<sup>st</sup> century principals have been met by the principal candidates who believe they are ready to assume the role. They have successfully completed the required training, participated in volunteer training opportunities, sought advanced degrees and worked in their current jobs to develop their leadership abilities. These principal candidates perceived their lack of success to be due to the barriers created by 1) lack of supporting roles, 2) nepotism and conflicts of interest within the school district, 3) lack of opportunities to showcase their leadership qualities, and 4) lack of a well defined training program for principals. The data suggest that not only do these principal candidates struggle with their perceptions of the challenges posed by the

districts process for advancement, but they also continue to struggle with developing professional relationships, accepting responsibility for their lack of advancement, and engaging in self reflective practice that would aid them in making the self corrections necessary to navigate to the next level.

The recognition of the power and influence of mentoring and advocate relationships to advancement is noted by the principal candidates. At some point during their journey they have had the support of mentors and advocates who believed in their ability to be leaders and encouraged them in their pursuit. They recognize the disadvantage of not having a mentor or advocate during this final stage in their journey. They distinguish this absence as a clear barrier to their promotion to the principalship.

The personal relationships that provided an advantage to some candidates as they are seeking promotion to the principalship were discussed by the principal candidates. Nepotism and conflicts of interest is identified clearly as a factor that impedes candidates from having a genuine opportunity to be fairly judged as a principal candidate based on experience and merit alone. Each of the principal candidates in this study denotes a lack of connections to influential people in the district.

Each of the principal candidates believes that they have demonstrated their leadership skills and the capacity to lead. They have the necessary qualifications to be principals. They demonstrate high levels of proficiency in their assistant principal roles, and other responsibilities. The opportunity for others beyond the school setting to witness or learn about their qualifications does not exist. The assistant principal job is remote from the influential higher ups that could positively impact the principal candidate's advancement.

These principal candidates are strong advocates of following the proper protocol and working hard to earn access to the position. Each candidate has followed the outlined path that has been established by the district. They have made every effort to develop the leadership skills necessary to obtain the principalship. However, what skills are needed and the process for developing those skills has not been clear. Candidates are not all required to have the same training or to follow the same district protocols.

Some leadership candidates have had to work harder than others to attain their skills and remain viable candidates for the principalship. The principal candidates indicate that they have fallen into this category. Their journey has been disappointing at times, but they have refused to lose hope. They continue to go on interviews and to keep themselves prepared to assume the role for such a time when they are selected. The principal candidates have considered seeking principalships in other districts, but remain loyal to the district they are currently employed. They hold on to hope that the right opportunity will come and they will be promoted to principalships. The principal candidates report that they have become more selective in the principal position in which they request interviews. Their journey has afforded them a keen sense of what a good fit for them looks like and when an opportunity to acquire a principalship is unadulterated.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

Although there have been numerous studies that examined the preparation and training process for aspiring school leaders few have examined the barriers that impede the advancement of prepared principal candidates. Across the nation school districts continue to report shortages of principal candidates while there are numerous candidates in the selection pool that have not received a principalship. This study was carried out to identify and examine the specific occurrences that principal candidates, who have not been successful in advancing to the role of principal, perceived as barriers. The study focused on the careers of three female assistant principals seeking advancement to the role of principal. The identification and elucidation of the perceived barriers will help current principal candidates and those aspiring to become principal candidates understand the potential barriers, the transformative experiences, and growth opportunities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study as outlined in chapter one was to expand and deepen the knowledge about the factors that act as barriers for licensed principal candidates who have been unsuccessful in becoming principals. The study sought an understanding of how and what experiences influenced the lack of advancement as well as how those experiences are interpreted and meaning constructed.

## **Design of Study**

This study was designed to answer the following research question:

What are the factors identified by licensed principal candidates that exemplify the barriers they perceive to have prevented them from advancement to the role of principal?

The literature review was conducted through the conceptual lens of andragogy and focused on: (1) the effective schools movement and its role in identifying leadership as a key component of effective schools; (2) the characteristics of effective schools and the behaviors of effective leaders on influencing school learning environments and student achievement; (3) the role of teacher leadership; (4) the assistant principalship; (5) mentoring and advocacy as it relates to the journey toward the principalship; (6) preparation practices, and (7) the barriers that prevent principal candidates from acquiring the position of principal. The research revealed a myriad of studies that discussed skills needed to be a principal, components of successful programs, the value of the teaching experience, the assistant principalship, and training and mentoring relationships. However, none of the literature outlined the path that leads to the principalship or explained why some candidates are unsuccessful.

Qualitative research methods were used to collect and analyze the data.

Specifically, structured interviews, participant questionnaire, and reflection postcards were used to gather this information. This chapter provides an expansive discussion about the findings from Chapter Four, highlights implications for future research, and presents suggestions for future practice.

## **Findings and Conclusions**

### **Lack of Supporting Roles**

Supporting roles are critical to the development of leadership skills. Those who serve as a support system for aspiring candidates provide coaching, advice, feedback, and access to skills and experiences necessary for effective leadership development. The results of this study identified mentoring and advocacy and the principal as key supporting roles for principal candidates.

**Mentoring and Advocacy.** The results of this study confirmed the lack of understanding about the role of a mentoring and advocacy relationship as a barrier to the advancement of the principal candidates to the principalship. There is no disagreement regarding the necessity of a mentoring/advocacy relationship as supported by the research of Marshall, et al.(1992) and Villani, (2006) in which the evidence confirmed the need for a principal candidate to have a mentor of some type who will offer informal support, training, and collegiality that assures the aspiring principal the visibility, advice, and career direction needed to build a successful administrative career. In addition, there is agreement with the research of Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) which further contends that candidates who have an advocate have a better chance of advancing the career ladder into school leadership.

In the study by Marshall, et al. (1992) one of the participants complained about not being able to advance to the principalship due to the lack of a mentor or advocate to promote him. The participant noted the principal as recognizing his leadership abilities, but not advocating for his promotion. This was a common theme among the three study participants. Each indicated that they did not have someone who was promoting them as

viable candidates for the principalship. They acknowledged the benefits acquired from mentoring/advocacy relationships that occurred on their journey to the assistant principalship. These earlier relationships provided encouragement, assistance, and skill development along with promotion to higher-ups. The principal candidates failed to see the journey to the principal as continuous. The mentoring/advocacy that they had received from their inception into school leadership should have served as a catalyst to any level of school leadership along the continuum.

The study participants emphasized the need for a mentor/advocate in this final stage of the journey toward the principalship as a resource to promote their skills and abilities to higher-ups in order to obtain a principalship placement. They consistently reported their completion of the necessary training and steps for advancement and their readiness to be principals. The study candidates' view of the mentor/advocates role needed in this final stage is validated in studies by Casavant and Cherkowski (2001) and Skrla, Erlandson, Reed, and Wilson, (2001) in which the role of the advocate is describe as a person who promotes candidates who have achieved formation and are consistently demonstrating high levels of readiness to assume the next level of leadership. At this stage advocates are willing to challenge the beliefs of others and place their reputation on the line in support of a candidate. The mentoring/advocacy desire of the aspiring principal candidates at this stage in their career was consistent with the description of the advocate's role. Yet, the principal candidates in this study never discussed the possibility that their lack of a mentor or advocate to promote them to the principalship at this time could be directly related to the perception by those who would be viable mentors and advocates that they were not ready to assume the role.

The principal candidates discussed the fact that they were given some opportunities to learn new task, attend trainings, and work on projects at their current worksites. These assignments represent professional development opportunities that could improve the principal candidate's chances for promotion. The assignments also represent the possibility that the principal candidate had not "achieved formation" and had not "consistently demonstrated high levels of readiness." The principal candidates in this study were afforded the opportunity to learn and grow by their principals which is one of the fundamentals of mentoring.

Only informal mentoring/advocacy relationships were discussed by the principal candidates in this study. Statements made by the principal candidates regarding their mentoring experiences reveal misconceptions about the role of a mentor. While the principal candidates acknowledge the traditional role of the mentor to support, guide, and encourage, they also had strong beliefs that the mentors role is to get them a promotion. The unstructured format of the mentoring relationships that the principal candidates had may account for this misconception. In addition, the perception of the principal candidates that promotions were politically motivated, promoted thinking that "who you know" is important. A study by Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) questioned the validity of informal mentoring relationships noting that informal relationships do not adhere to a standard set of criteria designed to foster the needed skills for the principalship and are not available to all potential candidates. Young, et al. (2005) exposed the deficits of informal mentoring relationships which allow each person who

serves as a mentor to determine what needs to be taught and what type of role will exist between the mentor and the protégé. These studies addressed the misconceptions about the role of the mentor that the study participants displayed.

It is evident from recent research that formal mentoring programs offer more structure and standardization (Bloom, et al., 2005; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Daresh, 2004; Villani, 2006). The formalized mentoring programs set guidelines for mentoring relationships, criteria to be explored and monitor the process to ensure that mentoring relationships are mutually enhancing. Formalized mentoring programs are professional development opportunities between two people with a beginning and an end. In the formal mentoring relationship the intended outcomes of professional development are specified and there is closure at the end. The mentoring relationships that the principal candidates in this study reported having were those that happen by chance and lacked the negotiation of goals and intended outcomes. Thus, the principal candidates were not able to recognize the benefits of the mentoring they had received in this final stage of the journey to the principalship. They had been limited by their misperceptions about the role of the mentor and the expectation that mentors were their key to the next level. This is the greatest barrier to the advancement of these candidates; having only the ability to see mentoring as promotion to the next level means that they have overlooked opportunities to improve their practice.

Significant emphasis is placed on mentoring and advocacy relationships as critical components of advancement to the principalship. The principal candidates point out that they have done everything within their power to move toward a principalship and are now essentially relying on someone else to move them into the role. They, without fail, repetitively blamed their lack of success on the fact that they did not have a mentor or an advocate to speak on their behalf.

There was a strong belief among the principal candidates that they could not reach the level of principal without a mentor or an advocate to promote them. According to research principal candidates can become too dependent on a mentoring relationship and cease to grow in terms of autonomy, self-reliance, and responsibility (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Villani, 2006; Wilmore, 2004; Young, Sheets, & Knight, 2005). The candidates in this study demonstrated behaviors that are consistent with the findings from this study. These candidates no longer relied on their skills and abilities as the basis for their promotion to the role of principal. They have assumed a “here I am, ready and, waiting” attitude that may have become a barrier to their own promotion. They are not engaging in self reflective analysis to create baseline data about their skills and abilities as they relate to the principalship, thus overlooking changes that they may need to make in order to find success.

**Principal as a Support System.** The candidates in this study indicated that the lack of a supporting principal was a barrier to the principalship. They asserted that the principal held significant power over their opportunities for growth and development. This perception is consistent with research findings stressing the importance of the relationship of leadership candidates to the principal. The principal has chief control over

the resources, training experiences, and access to information, and opportunities for visibility of the aspiring leadership candidates (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Crow, 2006; Marshall, et al.1992). A consistent theme within the literature recognizes the role of the principal in building leadership capacity in teachers and assistant principals with a goal of directing them to the principalship (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Gorton, 1987; Graham, 1987). In fact it is noted that the principal has a professional obligation to promote personal and professional growth in principal candidates.

In this study the principal candidates viewed the principal as having significant impact on their opportunities for advancement. The principal candidates discussed the opportunities that they had been given by principals that assisted in the upward mobility of their career as well as the denied opportunities to assume roles of responsibility; learn tasks associated with advancement; and showcase their leadership abilities. Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) described the inclusiveness of the relationship between the principal and the principal candidate as the most effective mentoring relationship. This inclusive relationship requires the principal to bring the principal candidate into absolute confidence, sharing inside information about the informal networks and systems that dictate the school districts operation. Since this role may not be made available to all principal hopefuls it could be seen as a barrier. In fact one of the study participants indicated that such a role had not been available to her.

The principal candidates discussed the various ways that the principal had afforded them professional development opportunities related to skills needed for the principalship. Nevertheless it is significant to note that the principal candidates' responses indicated that they did not perceive this as mentoring since the end result was

not their advancement to the principalship. In this final stage of their journey to the principalship the role of a mentor or an advocate that they sought was strictly someone who would intercede on their behalf and lead them to a principalship. They overlooked the obvious role of the mentor to teach, coach, and advise in favor of a role that is strictly aimed at lobbying for promotion to the next level.

### **Nepotism and Conflicts of Interest**

There have been reported issues of favoritism within the government, public service, and organizations since the middle ages. Thus far there has been no solution to prevent these relationships from infiltrating an organization. In a survey of 1200 employees in the U.S.A. it was reported that three quarters of the employees believed that their immediate bosses behaved with honesty and integrity; however they were somewhat less certain about top leadership (Chervenak & McCullough, 2007). The perception of favoritism in the workplace destroys relationships and spreads a sense of distrust. It may be perceived by some and not others, and whether real or imagined, it creates disgruntled employees.

It was the perception of the study candidates that district promotions were based on relationships with higher-ups. There were reported incidents by the study participants of being denied promotions where they perceived they were clearly the best candidate in favor of a lesser candidate with connections in high places. In some of the statements made by the study participants they claimed that candidates were preselected, interview committees padded, and interview questions shared in advance. Again this information

was presented as rumor and gossip and was not accompanied by any substantive proof. Nepotism and conflicts of interest were listed as a barrier to advancement by the study participants; however they failed to provide substantial evidence to support their claims.

The study participant's comments implicate them as discontented employees who were unwilling to accept that they had not been promoted because another candidate was better suited for the position and perhaps they were not at the level required for the promotion. They sought to justify why they were not being promoted by claiming nepotism and conflict of interest. There is a vast amount of competition in the workforce. Everyone is look for something or someone that will give them an edge over other potential candidates. Whether it's family or friends that give you an 'in' to a particular job, it's become a practice throughout business that this is acceptable (Chervenak & McCullough, 2007). The use of a connection to get a "foot in the door" does not negate the fact that a merit-based system is being used to determine when and who is rising through the ranks (Chervenak & McCullough, 2007). The principal candidates in this study are grounded in their belief of personal readiness to assume the role of principal and oblivious of their personal responsibility for their lack of advancement.

### **Lack of opportunity to showcase leadership qualities**

**Isolated Role of the Assistant Principal.** The findings of this study identified the lack of opportunities to showcase leadership skills as a barrier to advancement to the principalship. This barrier is manifested in the isolated nature of the assistant principals' job which prevents those beyond the school level from seeing the leadership capabilities of the principal candidates. This serves as a barrier to the principalship because the principal candidates must rely on the principal to share with others the merits of their

capacity for doing the job. The isolated nature of the assistant principals' job does not provide the opportunity for principal candidates to showcase their leadership skills to the district. While there are no studies that specifically address the assistant principals job as an isolating experience; there is vast disagreement among researchers regarding the assistant principalship and its subsequent role in the development of future principals. Some researchers see it as a career ladder step toward the principalship while others see it as a separate entity ( (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1995; Marshall, et al.1992).

Regardless of the validity of the assistant principalship as preparation for the principalship it is a prerequisite in most districts. The significant understanding derived from this study was the fact that only those who work with the principal candidate onsite see their capabilities and capacity for leadership as a principal. This isolation requires candidates to rely on others to sell them as a viable candidate for advancement. This takes some of the control for the principal candidate's destiny out of their hands and places them at the good graces of someone else. The participants expressed concern and uncertainty regarding how well their perceived level of readiness was being conveyed beyond the school setting.

While having to rely on someone else to speak on your behalf is a barrier, these principal candidates did not exhibit the necessary initiative to utilize their own influence to build a strong supportive relationship with the principal they are relying on to promote them. Similar to the conclusions of Browne-Ferrigno, (2003) these candidates failed to realize that they were responsible for their own achievement. Being responsible means

taking on tasks in addition to those defined by the job description that will provide additional exposure and enhance the development of a strong relationship with the principal. As laborious and time consuming as this task can be, it is an investment in the principal candidate's future.

The study participants did not appear to be actively engaged in creating opportunities to showcase their abilities. They were essentially waiting for tasks to be offered or given and hoping they would get noticed. These participants were passive about demonstrating their leadership skills; essentially waiting for opportunities to come to them and to get noticed. It is clear from the participants' response that they did not believe training and skills alone would be enough to ensure they advanced the career ladder to principal. Yet, the responses of these candidates reveal a lack of assertiveness in their pursuit of opportunities and about identifying themselves as true competitors for the available opportunities when they insist that their lack of success is due to not having a mentor or advocate to promote them as viable candidates for the principalship.

**Use of interview as the only selection criteria.** The selection of principals is a high stakes task that poses risks for the candidate and the district. The candidate will leave a tenured position for the opportunity to lead and direct a school, while the district will entrust the chosen candidate with the task of providing the instructional and operational leadership for the entire school. It is easy to see how the use of one interview to determine the best candidate appears inadequate to those on the outside as well as

those taking part in the process. The interview as the single determining factor of a candidate best suited to assume the role of a principal was viewed as a barrier by the principal candidates in this study. The candidates disputed the ability of the interviewers to obtain enough information to make a credible selection.

Behavior based interviews were used by the district which employees these principal candidates. According to research by Clement, (2008) behavior based interviews use past behavior as the predictor for future performance. This interview style allows the interview committee to gain more objective evidence about a potential candidate's skills and abilities. In the behavior based interview model the interviewer has identified the skills needed to do the specific job and prewritten questions related to those skills. The overall goal of the behavior based interview is to gather fact based information about relevant, successful experiences related to the questions. It is the responsibility of the aspiring candidate to "sell" themselves to the interview committee. John Daresh (2001) identified the interview as one of the barriers preventing prepared principal candidates from getting through the final level of the principal selection process. According to Daresh, too many aspiring principals mistakenly view the interview process as a routine procedure not recognizing what the interview means and what is involved in being thoroughly prepared.

The principal candidates in this study discussed some of the ways that they prepared for interviews. They reported reviewing past questions, obtaining information about the school, and going over some of their leadership experiences. It may be a fair assumption, since it was not mentioned by the candidates, that they were not aware of the behavior based interview model and the significance of demonstrating in the interview

the leadership experiences and skills that they possess. The candidates felt that a field observation and recommendations from others they worked with, including teachers, would be a better indicator of their leadership capacity. Additionally, when the candidates discussed the feedback they had received regarding previous interviews they used descriptors such as lacks passion, monotone voice intonation, and does not smile. The candidates did not indicate any feedback comments that pertained to deficits regarding the manner in which they responded to the interview questions. Such data would have been more telling of the level of readiness they conveyed in the interview. In a behavior based interview everything the candidate does from the moment they walk in is used as an indicator of success. It is important for the candidate to show passion, enthusiasm and come across as a person who can be both a cheerleader and a spokesperson for the school (Daresh, 2001). It is also essential that the candidate demonstrate readiness to assume the job through the detailing of past related experiences.

### **Lack of a clearly defined training program for principal candidates**

The principal candidates in this study identified the knowledge and skill areas they perceived to be important to their initial success as a principal. Their responses were varied but the general agreement centered around flexibility, knowledge, collaboration, and people skills. According to the principal candidates the district principal training program did not adequately address the skills and competencies needed to be a principal. They identified the lack of a clearly defined training program as a barrier to their promotion to the principalship.

There is an enormous body of research describing the skills and behaviors necessary to be an effective principal (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Gronn, 2002; Shen & Sanders-Crawford, 2003) and there has been much criticism of principal preparation programs on the state and local level. These formal principal preparation programs have received criticism for failing to equip principals for the challenges and opportunities posed by 21<sup>st</sup> century demands (Hess & Kelly, 2005). It is a well documented fact that the traditional preparation provided by universities is only a small portion of the prerequisites that lead to an effective principalship (Daresh & Playko, 1992). District level training has been designed to prepare principal candidates to deal with forces unique to individual school systems and address state forces impacting the principalship (Morrison, 2005). These programs must be designed with the needs of adult learners in mind.

According to Brookfield (1993) rigidly structured learning environments impede the natural growth and development of the learner and often force conformity to the organizational norms that promote individual success. He further recommends that self directed learners should be given the opportunity to create learning networks and study groups that allows the exchange of knowledge and reflection on what is being learned. This research supports the principal training model used in the district where the study participants are employees. The model used by this district included a cohort of candidates that work together to determine learning needs and develop collegial bonds.

Brookfield (1993) emphasizes the importance of the experiential methods such as case studies, role play, simulations, and internships that provide practice and implementation of the learning. Experiential methods naturally foster reflection as the adult learner thinks about and evaluates the experience (Fisher, 1995). Brookfield (1993) and Fisher (1995) agree that reflection and collaboration are important components in adult learning.

The study participants expected to develop new leadership skills and knowledge base as a part of the principal training program. This may have been true of the university courses taken to acquire certification in educational leadership. The district principal training program was designed to assist candidates with synthesis and application of the leadership skills they had already developed. The training is about recognizing which skills were needed in a given situation and practicing the usage of those skills in order to achieve formation. In a study by Joseph (2009) regarding district level principal training programs extensive opportunities were provided to candidates to engage in reflective practice. These candidates reported that the reflective practice was beneficial to their growth as administrators. The study participants' revealed a mistaken belief that the training program was to develop new skills as indicators of readiness to assume the principal role when they discussed the unstructured nature of the program and the fact that the skills taught were vague and irrelevant to the principalship. These statements may be further evidence of the growth that is still needed by the candidates.

### **Significant Learnings from the Study**

It has already been established that the participants in this study had been actively pursuing a career as a school principal. Each of participants indicated that they have made numerous attempts to acquire a principal position. This study examined the

perceived barriers of these participants regarding their inability to attain a principal position. The participants clearly indicated that their lack of success was directly related to the lack of a mentor or an advocate; poor preparation due to lack of opportunities; an inadequate training program for principals at the district level and nepotism and conflicts of interest within the district. The participants also held liable district leaders who have flawed perceptions of their leadership ability and did not provide the support they perceived themselves to deserve. The study findings implicated the participants as barriers to their own success. These participants had completed all of the training and may possess all of the necessary leadership skills, but there was evidence that they had not demonstrated formation of the leadership skills and the assertiveness necessary to lead a school when they blamed their lack of success on limited opportunities to showcase their skills and leadership ability. This study was based on the perceived level of readiness of the participants as evidenced through successful completion of the principal training program. These principal hopefuls viewed the completion of the program as confirmation of readiness and a right to a position. Across the nation principal pools are filled with similar candidates who have not been successful in obtaining a principal position; a puzzling concept amid national claims of principal candidate shortages. These findings may provide an understanding of why there are pools of candidates that are not being selected for principal positions.

### **Recommendations**

Perhaps the central lesson to be learned from this study is that the success of a principal candidate has much to do with their ability to demonstrate readiness to assume the role. There are multiple studies about the skills needed to become a principal and

preparation processes to acquire those skills. What is missing is how some candidates successfully demonstrate their level of readiness to assume the role of principal and others clearly do not. Leadership is an evolutionary process that never reaches fruition. The skill set a leader acquires is enhanced with each scenario, situation, and assignment. Leadership demands continual growth and development. This study supported current literature as it pertained to the need for mentors and advocates for leadership candidates, the role of the principal, and preparation practices. The conclusions of this study point to the failing of the principal candidates and their misperceptions of their own level of readiness as barriers to their advancement. These findings present several implications for further research.

1. A study of principal candidates who have acquired principalship after a significant length of time and their perceptions of what corrections they made that advanced their career.
2. A comparison study of the preparation experiences of principal candidates who were successful in getting a principalship in contrast to principal candidates who were unable to advance to the role.
3. Repeat of this study using male candidates.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

In terms of practice, the results of this study suggest that training programs should emphasize behavior based interviews as a critical element in obtaining a principal position. The principal candidates in this study were unsuccessful in the interview because they were not able to communicate their past behaviors and experiences that made them stand out. Principal preparation should include extensive training in behavior

based interviewing. The focus should be on helping candidates understand how to convey their knowledge and skill to interview committees. This would also require that districts train all interviewers in behavior based interviewing to ensure that they understand how to listen and distinguish evidence of past experience, and knowledge of the question topics. Given the importance of the principals role in leading a school it is vital that the aspiring candidate recognize that preparation is more than a check off of requirements. It would serve future principal hopefuls well to remember that leadership is a journey not a destination. It has no definitive end and it is timeless. It is an individual personal journey that is different for each person. The classic knowledge base learned in the classroom is just a framework for practice. The experiences and learning opportunities are what shape and mold the aspirants' character and craft. Principal hopefuls should savor each of the opportunities provided to learn and discover new things about themselves and how they will handle the myriad of situations that a principal will encounter.

It is also important that principal hopeful learn to be reflective practitioners. As reflective practitioners the principal hopefuls will remain in an evaluative state that augments their development as leaders and viable candidates. Engaging in reflective practice means the aspirant will be in a continuous state of learning. The primary benefit of reflective practice is a deeper understanding of one's own leadership style and ultimately, greater effectiveness as a leader.

## **Summary**

This study was designed to identify the barriers that impede prepared principal candidates from promotion to the role of principal. The results indicate that there is no one universal answer to illuminate the factors or the barriers associated with promotion. The differences in the candidates who are promoted and those who are not remain ambiguous. Perhaps it is to be revealed through future research.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A: The Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)**

*Standard 1:* A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

*Standard 2:* A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

*Standard 3:* A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

*Standard 4:* A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

*Standard 5:* A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

*Standard 6:* A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context (Educational Leadership Policy Standards:ISLLC 2008, 2008).

## **Appendix B: National Policy Board of Administration 21 Domains of Leadership**

### **Functional Domain**

1. Leadership
2. Information collection
3. Problem Analysis
4. Judgment
5. Organizational Oversight
6. Implementation
7. Delegation

### **Programmatic Domains**

8. Instruction and the Learning Environment
9. Curriculum Design
10. Student Guidance and Development
11. Staff Development
12. Measurement and Evaluation
13. Resource Allocation

### **Interpersonal Domains**

14. Interpersonal domains

## **Appendix B (continued)**

- 15. Interpersonal Sensitivity
- 16. Oral and nonverbal Expression
- 17. Written Expression

### **Contextual Domains**

- 18. Philosophical and cultural Values
- 19. Legal and Regulatory Applications
- 20. Policy and Political Influences
- 21. Public Relations (Skrla, Erlandson, Reed, & Wilson, 2001).

## Appendix C: Background School Demographic Questionnaire

1. How many years did you teach before becoming an administrator?

3----5          6----8          9----11          12+

2. How many years have you been in this district?

1----5          6----10          11---15          16----20          20+

In other districts?

1----5          6----10          11---15          16----20          20+

3. What positions have you held in this district? In other districts?

4. How many years have you been an assistant principal?

0----3          4----7          8----11          12+

At the current school?

0----3          4----7          8----11          12+

5. What is your gender?

6. What is your age?

24---30          31---35    36---40          41---45          46---50          51---55          56+

7. What degrees have you earned? What university or college issued the degree?

8. When did you complete the requirements for a principal licensure?

9. How many times have you interviewed for a principal position? At what levels;  
elementary, middle, high?

## **Appendix D: Interview Protocol One**

1. Was education your intended career path?
2. How did you get into educational leadership? Were you tapped, encouraged, mentored?
3. Was becoming a principal a part of your plan or something you decided after becoming an assistant principal?
4. How many times did you apply to the principal training program before you were accepted? Why do you think it took so many attempts? Why do you think you were accepted so quickly?
5. Do you feel the district should have more rigorous selection criteria for entering the preparation program? Why?
6. Do you feel the district did you a disservice when they selected you for the preparation program and have not allowed you to advance? Why or Why not?
7. What do you think are the five essential skills needed to be an effective principal? Do you feel you possess those skills?
8. Does the district principal preparation program foster the development of the five essential skills you listed? Are there other opportunities for candidates to develop the skills? Have you been able to advantage of those opportunities?
9. Does the program prepare you to be a viable candidate in a competitive field? Why not?

**Appendix D (continued)**

10. What additional training and experiences did you pursue on your own in preparation to be a principal?
11. Do you feel that all candidates have an equal opportunity to get interviews and to be hired? What gives some candidates an advantage?
12. How important is it for principal candidates to have an opportunity to showcase their skills and abilities? Have you had those opportunities? Why not?
13. As a principal candidate who has the most influence on your opportunities for advancement? How?
14. What type of leader are you?
15. What type of school do you think is the best fit for you? Have you worked in those best fit environments?
16. Do you feel you have enough practical experience to work with the different communities and population groups in your district? Why not/
17. Do you feel it is necessary to have an advocate and/or mentor to advance to the principalship? Do you currently have an advocate and/or mentor?
  - a. How has the mentor helped you gain a principal position?
  - b. How has the advocate helped you gain a principal position?
18. Has anyone hindered your advancement? How?
19. Is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss?

## **Appendix E: Interview Protocol Two**

1. How soon after completing the training program did you start interviewing?
2. Have you received feedback from your principal interviews? Please share some of the comments.
3. How have you used this feedback?
4. Did you find the feedback helpful?
5. Do you feel it was honest feedback?
6. Was there a time when you interviewed for a position that you felt you were the perfect candidate? Why do you think you did not get the job?
7. Do you feel that factors other than the interview should be considered when selecting principal candidates? What are the factors?
8. Do you feel you have leadership qualities that the interview did not reveal? How might those leadership qualities be discovered by those that are hiring?
9. Do you believe that there have been political barriers to your becoming a principal? What are they? How have they hindered your progress?
10. Do you believe that there have been social barriers to your becoming a principal? What are they? How have they hindered your progress?
11. Do you believe that there have been cultural barriers to your becoming a principal? What are they? How have they hindered your progress?
12. Do you feel that ethnicity has hindered your advancement? How? Share an example?

## Appendix E (continued)

13. Is your age a factor that may have contributed to your lack of advancement?

How do you know? Why?

14. Physical appearance is one of the first things interviewers see. Do you always put forth a professional demeanor? Why or why? Do you think this has hindered your advancement

15. Have you ever met with the superintendent, associate superintendent to discuss your career aspirations? Who set up the meeting? What did you discuss? What was the outcome?

16. Has the road leading to the principalship been more challenging than you were lead to believe or expected?

17. What do you currently do to ensure that you are still a viable candidate for the school principal position?

18. Do you feel your current principal sees your leadership ability and is supporting you as a candidate for a principalship? Why or why not?

19. Is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss?

## **Appendix F: Interview Protocol Three**

1. Do you believe you have become a barrier to your own advancement? How?
2. Are you angry about not yet advancing to the role of school principal?
3. Are you still interviewing a position? When you go on interviews at this point do you honestly feel you have a chance to get the job? Why or why not?
4. After going on numerous interviews, what do you think of the districts interview process?
5. Is there a rumor mill in your district that predicts who will get vacant principal positions? How accurate are the predictions? Do you think positions are promised before the interview?
6. Tell me about the person who has had the greatest influence on you during your leadership development journey. How does that person feel about your lack of advancement?
  - a. Have you talked with him/her about not yet getting a principalship?
  - b. Have you asked him/her for help?
7. Have you attempted to apply for principal positions outside of your current district? What was the result? Why not?
8. Do you think you will ever become a principal?
9. Is there any event in your career that you feel is responsible for your lack of success in getting a principal position?
10. Do you think the district still sees you as a viable candidate? What makes you think so? What makes you think not?

**Appendix F (continued)**

11. What do you feel is your greatest barrier at this moment to getting a  
principalship? Is there any way to overcome it?
12. Do you know someone who could help you in getting a position? What have they  
done to help?
13. What are your next steps or plans for the future?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss?

## **Appendix G: Email Soliciting Call for Participation**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am contacting you to enlist your help in a research project which relates to my doctoral dissertation in educational leadership under the supervision of Dr. Bobbie Greenlee in the USF College of Education. My other committee members are Dr. Darlene Bruner, Dr. Nell Faucette, and Dr. William Young. The purpose of the study is to explore the preparation experiences of successful school principals in Pinellas County. I will be conducting the interviews in spring 2010. Participating in the study will take approximately 4 hours of your time. The interviews, with your permission will be digitally recorded and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, your comments will not be identified by name on the recording. I and/or a professional transcriber will be transcribing the recordings; however, to assure confidentiality an ascribed letter, such as participant A, B, C and so forth will be used only to identify each transcript. At any time during the interview you may turn off the digital recorder

The USF Institutional Review Board has approved the project and all appropriate measures will be taken to insure confidentiality.

If you are interested in participating in the study I would appreciate hearing from you. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact me at this email or at 727 560-8794. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Robyn R. Witcher

## **Appendix H: Member Check Form**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for an enjoyable and insightful interview. Attached please find a draft copy of the verbatim transcripts of the interview. Please review the transcription for accuracy and completeness of responses. Please feel free to contact me at (727-560-8794) or via email at (witcherr@pcsb.org) should you have any questions. If I do not hear from you by \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_2009, I will assume that you agree with the attached draft of the transcription.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study.

Robyn R. Witcher

\*This form was adapted from a sample member check from Janesick (2004, p. 227).

## **Appendix I: Informed Consent for an Adult**

Social and Behavioral Sciences  
University of South Florida

### **Information for People Who Take Part in Research Studies**

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Research at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. This study investigates the factors that prevent principal candidates from advancement to the role of principal. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study.

#### **Title of Research Study: A Descriptive Study of the Factors that Prevent Principal Candidates from Advancing to the Principal Position.**

**Person in Charge of Study:** Robyn R. Witcher

**Where study will be done:** Doctorial Dissertation, University of South Florida

#### **Should you take part in this study?**

This form tells you about the research study. You can decide if you want to take part in it. You do not have to take part. Reading this form can help you decide.

#### **Why is this research being done?**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that prevent prepared principal candidates from advancement to principal role.

#### **Why are you being asked to take part?**

I am asking you to take part in this study because you have been a principal candidate for three years and interviewed for the role three times.

#### **What will happen during this study?**

You will be asked to participate in three interviews and reflective writing. The interviews will not take more than one hour each and the reflective writings will be done at your convenience and take no more than five to ten minutes each. With your permission the interview will be audio taped.

## **Appendix I (continued)**

### **What are the potential benefits if you take part in this study?**

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

### **What are the risks if you take part in this study?**

There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

What will we do to keep your study records private?

Federal law requires us to keep your study records private. All research data collected will be stored securely and confidentially. Interviews and focus group sessions will be digitally recorded and burned to a CD which will be secured in the Principal Investigators office. Recordings will be transcribed and all identifying information will be removed.

By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are the researcher and regulatory entities such as the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) or the USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its staff, and any other individuals acting on behalf of USF.

Results from this study may be published. If published, your name or anything else that would let people know who you are will not be used.

### **What happens if you decide not to take part in this study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to take part in this study, that is okay. You should only take part in this study if you want to take part. You may choose to skip a question. You are free to withdraw from this interview session at any time without penalty. Should you withdraw from the study, all data generated from your participation shall be destroyed.

### **You can get the answers to your questions.**

If you have questions about this study, call Robyn R. Witcher at (727) 560-8794. If you have questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in a study call USF Research Compliance at (813) 974-5638.

## **Appendix J: Postcard Protocol**

The following questions were given to the participants to reflect on prior to each interview. Two were given when the participants when they agreed to participate in the study and two were given to each participant at the end of interview one and interview two. The postcards were collected at the beginning of interview one, two, and three.

1. Reflecting on the first interview that you went on share the thoughts and feelings you had immediately after you left the interview.
2. Reflecting on the first rejection notification you received, how did you react,? Was it expected? After the initial disappointment wore off what plan of action did you formulate/
3. Reflect on the steps that you take to prepare for interviews.
4. Reflect on a time when you were truly insulted/ disappointed by your lack of success in obtaining the principalship in which you interviewed.
5. Reflect on what your peers and colleagues are saying about your lack of success in becoming a principal.
6. Reflect on why you believe you have not become a principal.