FAKING IT TO MAKE IT: ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES

ON EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Allan and Carol Gray,
thank you for your guidance, love, and encouragement.
I would not be the person I am today without you.

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the study was to better understand the roles and responsibilities of

beginning assistant principals and to anticipate how schools and preparation programs

might foster the development and retention of newly-hired assistant principals.

Researchers used qualitative research techniques for collecting data. Data collection

methods included the use of online reflective journal entries and focus groups. The study

consisted of three focus group meetings and four online reflective journals. Participating

in the study were seven, first year assistant principals.

Based upon the data, universities can better prepare graduate students for the field

by focusing instruction on more managerial tasks such as discipline, controversial

conversations, and time management. Research also suggested that school districts could

better prepare assistant principals by providing support systems and resources for novice

leaders. Finally, the research calls for collaboration efforts between universities and school

districts for better preparation and retention of assistant principals.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The increasing need for quality administrators is an ongoing crisis in the United States. With the retirements among the baby boom generation (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002) and increases in student enrollments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006), school administrators are in high demand. Although there have been increases in job positions for administrators, there has been a decrease in applying applicants (Herrington & Wills, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). The decline in qualified applicants is the result of the assistant principal positions' time requirements, lack of compensation, and stresses (Cantwell, 1993; Glanz, 2004; Howely, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Because this educational leader position is so complex, recruiting excellent assistant principals is difficult (Winter, 2002).

Due to the complexity of the assistant principal position there has been an increased interest in educational leadership and the training and preparing of school leaders in hopes for better recruitment and retention efforts (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002). Because of the growing vacancies and increased interest in educational leadership, universities and school districts are examining the preparation efforts for aspiring assistant principals (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). There is a growing amount of research on universities (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000;

Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Orr, 2006; Wilmore, McNeil, & Townzen, 1999) and school districts (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Normore, 2005; Sherman, 2005) and their steps to improved preparation for assistant principals. Much of the research suggests changes in curriculum, internships, and calls for a partnership between universities and school districts, for successful program preparation (Bradshaw, Buckner, & Hopkins, 1997; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002). By creating a partnership, both school districts and academic programs can discuss what areas of preparation programs need improvement and how changes can be made to benefit both the academic and work setting (Bradshaw, Buckner, & Hopkins, 1997; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002). In order to better prepare administrators, universities and districts should be made that apply to both the work place and university setting.

We generally agree that school districts and universities should work together when generating preparation programs. Even though we know that universities and school district collaboration is key for effective preparation for aspiring assistant principals, there is a gap in communication between these two players. Based upon the literature and recognizing the need for an understanding of the responsibilities for the position and the need for communication between universities and districts, the purpose of the study was to determine how school districts and universities can better prepare and support first year assistant principals.

Research Questions

To investigate the purpose of study, the following questions were used in conducting research:

- What attracted individuals to the assistant principal position?

- How do assistant principals describe their roles and responsibilities?

- How do assistant principals describe the benefits of their preparation programs? In what ways did their university prepare students for the assistant principal position?

- How do assistant principals describe the benefits of the support they received within their districts?

- How might universities and school districts collaborate and work together for the preparation and support of first year assistant principals?

Methodology

This study examined assistant principals' perceptions on the assistant principal position and preparation programs for educational leadership. Participants were asked to share and describe feelings, attitudes, and experiences on their first year in the assistant principal role. I chose to use qualitative research methods for data collection. In qualitative research, researchers study things in "their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 3). I wanted to create dialogue and discussion where participants were discussing their 'natural setting' while producing meaning from their experiences.

Qualitative research consists of several methods for data collection. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) claim, "Qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus…it attempts to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in questions," (p. 8). In many studies researchers opt to use a multi-method approach referred to as triangulation. In this approach researchers collect their findings from several different data collection sources and methods which achieve broader and often better research results (Huberman & Miles, 1998). Fontana and Frey (2005) have found "the more methods they use to study, the better the chances of gaining some understanding of how participants construct their lives and stories they tell us about them" (p. 722).

Crystallization is another research approach that serves as alternative to triangulation. Crystallization is based upon the image of crystals, "they grow, change, alter….create different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, pp. 8). There is no one way to perceive a crystal, what you see when looking at a crystal depends on how you look at it and where you hold in regards to light (Richardson, 2000). Thus in research, there is no one way to perceive or identify truth, the data results from a combination of perceptions, experiences, and understandings (Richardson, 2000).

Instead of using triangulation for my study, I chose methods that would fall under Richardson's description of crystallization theory. Shortly after my focus group research began, I had to revisit my methods for data collection. Instead of pursuing three distinct methods, I chose to adhere to the focus group meetings coupled with individual reflective journaling prompted by my follow-up questions.

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My approach to this study was through two forms of data collection. The first form was utilizing a series of focus group meetings with participants. In this method "a small group of participants gather to discuss a particular issue under the guidance of a moderator" (Wibeck, Dahlgre, & Oberg, 2007, p.251). Each focus group meeting allows the researcher to hear the participants' ideas, feelings, and perceptions while seeing how people engage with each other-how views are constructed, expressed, defended, and possibly modified from the discussion within the group (Wibeck, Dahlren, & Oberg, 2007; Wilson, 1997). Within the focus group, "participants provide important insights and strategies for better understanding and working through the practices of a discussion" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p.88). My purpose in conducting focus groups was to create a dialogue and hear a variety of perspectives for the research questions.

The second set of data collection was through the use of online reflective journaling. Because the focus group holds a discussion among all participants, some perceptions may be withheld or influenced based on the perception of others. Responses within the focus group may not be representative of all of those in attendance. By having the researcher email each participant individually with a journal prompt, participants are able to reflect upon their own experiences and ideas without the risk of other participants seeing his or her response (Beverly, 2003; Chase, 2003). The reflective journal encourages private dialogue and what qualitative researchers refer to as testimonio. Short for a testimonial narrative, a testimonio is a printed narration told in the first person by the person who has witnessed an event he or she is recounting to the researcher (Beverly, 2003). The participant or narrator provides a voice that stands as part of a larger whole,

he or she is an actual person "who continues living and acting in an actual social space and time" (Beverly, 2003, p.320). By using focus groups and online reflective journaling, I gained a better understanding of the assistant principalship and ensure a variety of voices while providing both private and group dialog opportunities for participants.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature that is significant to the educational administration and the preparation of educational leaders. The purpose of this review is to present a synthesis of research and literature on leadership shortages, the assistant principalship, university preparation, school district preparation, and the collaboration of both academic settings.

Literature Review

There is an ever growing need for more educational leaders in school districts across the country. Although vacancies in administration positions are increasing, there is a decrease in the applying qualified applicants (Herrington & Wills, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). In addition to the lack of qualified applicants, the educational leaders filling the vacancies or who already working such positions are not adequately prepared to face the challenges schools are experiencing today (Wilmore, McNeil, & Townzen, 1999). The trend does not exist because of a shortage of certified educational leaders. There are significant numbers of administrator-certified individuals who could fill a position; however, they choose not to apply because the jobs are not attractive (Winter, 2002; Zellner, Jinkins, Gideon, Doughty, & McNamara, 2002). With the growing need for quality leaders and the variety of available leadership positions,

what actions can educational programs and school districts take to ensure effective administration preparation?

Why the Shortage?

The diminishing number of applicants for the abundance of school principal positions is a growing concern for education today. The decline in qualified applicants is occurring at a time when substantial amounts of principal retirements are occurring among the baby boom generation (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). The U.S. Department of Labor (2000) estimated that although the demand for school administrators is projected to increase twenty percent through the year 2008, forty percent of the nation's school leaders are nearing retirement, creating more vacancies for the minimal amount of applicants. In addition to retiring principals, some school leaders are choosing to leave the field prior to retirement thus creating more vacancies (Williamson & Hudson, 2003). Furthermore, the increase of student enrollment provides an increase in administrative positions in addition to the already growing vacancies brought on by retirees and leaders leaving the field (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

Principals claim many factors contribute to their leaving administrative positions prematurely. Some factors focus upon dealing with political conflicts, differences in approaches to leadership processes, and personal reasons (Brubaker & Coble, 1997; Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2000) while for others the stress and burden of the position were motivation to leave (Whitaker, 2001). Administrators found that the job was generally too stressful, required too much time, was insufficiently compensated when compared to responsibilities, and other reasons revolving around parents, community, and increased

accountability pressures from state and national mandates (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Whitaker, 2001; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002).

Despite the availability of principal positions, recruitment of qualified applicants is difficult due to the positions' required work load, time demands, and lack of compensation (Howely, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). These growing demands on administrators make the educational leadership position an unattractive profession causing recruitment to be an even more difficult task (Winter, 2002). With the increasing demands on education administrators brought about by national and state accountability standards, and changing demographics of schools, leadership within a school is not foreseen as a desirable occupation (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Zellner, Jinkins, Gideon, Doughty, & McNamara, 2002). With the increase in job complexity despite compensation, school districts are in desperate need of qualified school leaders.

The Assistant Principal

With the greater need for qualified school leaders, researchers are focusing their attention on the roles of the assistant principal. The position of assistant principal is foreseen as a "stepping-stone" into the principalship (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Winter & Partenheimer, 2002). Assistant principals play a fundamental role in school leadership and development (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004). There have been modest amounts of research conducted in understanding the roles and responsibilities of new assistant principals (Cantwell, 1993; Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Chirichello, 2001;

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Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Glanz, 1994; Mertz, 2000; Mertz & McNeely, 1999; Winter, 2002; Winter & Partenheimer, 2002) However, there is little literature on how schools and educational programs might foster development to ensure retention of these new school leaders (Mertz, 2000).

What we do know is that the role of the assistant principal has become quite complex over the years (Cranston, Troman, & Reugebrink, 2004; Grubb & Flesssa, 2006; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Daresh (2004) defines the assistant principal position as one of the more difficult educational professions that a person can do. While each assistant principal's duties may vary in time and task, the primary responsibilities of these school leaders have generally focused on routine administrative tasks, custodial duties, and discipline that require never ending attention and effort (Glanz, 1994; Glanz, 2004).

The complexity of the assistant principal position can lead to numerous conflicts and work overload (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The assistant principal rarely has a consistent, well-defined job description, delineation of duties, or way of measuring outcomes from completion of tasks (Glanz, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). At any point an assistant principal can be assigned a new task that requires immediate attention, prolonging any other task previously assigned (Daresh, 2004). Because of the lack of consistency within the assistant principal role, role ambiguity and conflict can easily occur (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Role conflict and overload transpire when an assistant principal is unable to adequately perform assigned tasks (Cantwell, 1993). Such a situation can worsen when the roles become ambiguous and the school leader faces never-ending responsibilities (Cantwell, 1993; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Overload can

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easily take place when responsibilities require significant amounts of time, emotion, and energy where little is left for an assistant principal's personal life (Daresh, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

The stress and complexity of the assistant principal position most likely will not change. In fact the role of the assistant principal will continue to become more challenging (Chirichello, 2001; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). The amount of work overload and burnout caused by ill-defined, inconsistent, and time consuming roles of the assistant principal is causation for vacancies which in turn only adds to the problem of filling school leadership positions (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The need to better prepare and educate aspiring assistant principals is a necessity for hiring and retaining qualified school leaders.

Academic Programs

Due to the constant changing dynamics of the assistant principal position, there has been an increased interest in educational leadership and the training and preparing of school leaders. (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002). Because of the ongoing need to fill school leadership positions and the lack of qualified applicantsto fulfill the vacancies, there is a growing awareness among education professionals that preparation efforts must be reformed. The need for reform in preparation programs became evident in a 1987 study by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEA) which brought attention to the needs and concerns of educational leaders (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). The study found preparation

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programs to have several deficiencies in the areas of curriculum, licensure, rigor, and recruitment (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). As a result of the NCEEA report, educational leadership programs across the country are undergoing changes in curriculum content, instruction, delivery, and field placements (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997).

University programs are the primary means of preparing school leaders (Orr, 2006) thus making this area of preparation for school leaders one of the first to be examined for effectiveness. There is an estimated 450 to 500 programs offering educational leadership preparation (Orr, 2006). Despite the large number of programs few have been sited as well developed and addressing the needs to preparing qualified applicants (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000). Researchers have found that many preparation programs are inadequate and lack curricular coherence and structure to provide the kinds of knowledge and pedagogy to produce exceptional school leaders (Hess & Kelly, 2005; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Tirozzi, 2001).

While there is a lack of research on current preparation practices in university programs for assistant principals, there is an abundance of suggestions for bettering the novice school leader in the land of academia. The abundance of suggestions fall in the areas of improving curriculum (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Orr, 2006), providing more internships and practical experience opportunities (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Milstein & Krueger, 1997), and the implementation of cohorts (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Marshall and Hooley

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(2006) recommend university programs consult the advice and involvement of educational professional associations. By consulting with educational professional associations, faculty can remain up to date on new trends, concerns, and educational issues affecting school leaders as well as provide learning opportunities on these areas.

Research suggests that curriculum focus on real-life scenarios and experiences that occur within a leadership position (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Courses should be developed in change, conflict resolution, teamwork and collaboration, delegation, analytical and process skills the capacity to foster learning communities, and understanding the larger political, social, and economic contexts of schooling (Orr, 2006). The focus of courses should be more experienced based, providing opportunities for students to construct meaning and knowledge from job- like situations (Chirichello, 2001; Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Training should focus on role-playing and practice in addition to readings, and reflective discussions (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Programs must promote reflective inquiry and personal growth through experience (Chirichello, 2001; Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Students should work collaboratively with practicing principals and faculty on real school concepts and issues (Chan, Webb, Bowen, & Zellner, 2003; Jinkins, Gideon, Doughty, & McNamara, 2002).

Universities have found a couple of ways to obtain both collaborative and authentic experience based learning through implication of cohorts. One major trend in university programs is the use of cohorts (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). A cohort is a class of students who go through

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university programs together, taking the same courses, sharing the same assignments and then completing the program together. Researchers recommend the use of cohorts in educational leadership programs because they have been found to increase performance of group members and promote reflective abilities (Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Cohorts develop strong social and interpersonal relationships, increase contact with faculty members, have clear program structure and course sequences, create better cohesiveness, and develop professional networks (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Cohorts promote collaboration, teamwork, and a variety of perspectives preparing future administrators for working with staff members, parents, and the community (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Jackson & Kelley, 2002).

Cohorts are not the only trend in university preparation efforts; internships are another preparation method that is widespread throughout the literature. Providing practicum experiences for novice school leaders is a strategy for preparing more qualified assistant principals. Internships consist of novices shadowing and working with current administrators to become more acquainted with the job position. The practicum prepares novices to cope with the operations and responsibilities that will be encountered once in the leadership position (Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Such internships should be guided by university programs or professional associations to ensure beneficial learning experiences (Orr, 2006; Wilmore, McNeil, & Townzen, 1999).This hands-on approach to learning enables novices to experience situations which require real-life problem solving skills (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Interns should be exposed to satisfactions, frustrations, and conflicts that can occur with the position thus allowing

the novice to better determine if the role is a fit for the perspective assistant principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Many universities offer short term internships in one to two semesters; however, researchers are strongly encouraging lengthening the internship to encompass the entire school year (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). This would allow interns to internalize the administrative role and see it throughout the entire school year, as opposed to one semester.

School Districts

Universities should not be alone in the efforts to better prepare school leaders. School districts should also help administrators develop professional skills and knowledge (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2000). The school district's influence on potential and current administrators can play an important role in the recruitment and retention of assistant principals. School districts need effective and quality leadership preparation and development programs in order to attract and retain school leaders (Normore, 2004).

With the abundance of change and increasing demands on schools, considerable research can be found on present and aspiring assistant principals and the steps districts should take to recruit and retain school leaders (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Normore, 2004; Sherman, 2005). These strategies for recruitment and retention are not representative of all school districts; they are proposed strategies to help with the crisis of school leader vacancies. One way in which school districts can better prepare and recruit young leaders is by hosting aspiring leadership academies. Such academies offer information about leadership and administrative issues, provide a program based on

high standards of performance, provide discussion and reflection opportunities, and establish networking opportunities (Hess & Kelly, 2005; Tracy & Weaver, 2000). Academies provide an introduction to school leadership discussing topics such as budget and finance, educational law, school climate, building maintenance, and special education (Sherman, 2005). Upon academy completion, participants can go into the field of administration or start pursuing graduate coursework to eventually become an administrator.

Socialization is an important element for retention and professional growth of school assistant principals. Normore (2004) found that socialization is a major component of any leadership development and should begin in preparation programs or even before. However, school districts should continue to encourage socialization whether through mentoring, cohort groups, or staff development opportunities. Providing times for socialization, give assistant principals opportunities for discussion, building relationships, and defining the roles of educational leaders. Peers help new leaders make sense of their responsibilities and relationships through memorable messages, deliberate demonstrations, mentoring, and even bad examples (Hausman, Nebecker, McCreary, & Donaldson, 2001).

Because socialization is crucial for the assistant principal, mentoring offers the opportunity to socialize and learn. Mentoring is a popular strategy for promoting professional growth and reflection and is the establishment of personal relationships with the purpose of promoting professional guidance and instruction (Daresh, 2004). Research has found that within the last ten years, thirty-two states have enacted laws and policies

that call for supportive programs like mentoring which are designed to assist school administrators (Daresh, 2004). By establishing mentor relationships, schools and universities are allowing opportunities for socialization, reflection, support, networking, and building confidence (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 2004; Dukess, 2001; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Mertz, 2004; Sherman 2005). Because mentoring builds confidence and personal fulfillment, it is seen as a method to retain administrators. If administrators have a support system, are confident in their abilities, and have someone to go to for guidance, they will find satisfaction in their role and be more inclined to stay (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000).

A Call for Collaboration

With the increasing assistant principal vacancies and need for skilled applicants to fill such positions, school districts and universities' efforts to prepare, recruit, and retain quality applicants is in its highest demand (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). The growing needs of today's schools place a responsibility upon colleges, universities, and school districts to identify and prepare quality assistant principals (Bradshaw, Buckner, & Hopkins, 1997). Recent research trends are pushing universities and school districts to work together in preparing training programs in order to promote quality and effective learning opportunities for future assistant principals (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Orr, 2006; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002). Bradshaw, Buckner, and Hopkins (1997) made the following statement regarding collaboration:

   If university faculty and school district personnel share an understanding

   of essential leadership skills and process for developing them, then

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collaboration will create quality preparation. As a result, university

preparation and school district leadership programs will be stronger and

better coordinated, and candidates entering positions will be more likely

to be able to apply theory to practice and demonstrate the required skills

on the job. (p.3)

There is a great need for collaboration between school districts and academic programs.

Collaboration is necessary for improving preparation programs, continuing education for

professors, ongoing program enhancement, and comprehensive examination of leadership

prep programs is a necessity for improvement (Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002).

Through working together, both school districts and academic programs can

discuss what areas of preparation programs need improvement and how changes can be

made to benefit both the academic and work setting (Bradshaw, Buckner, & Hopkins,

1997; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002). Networking between district and university

personnel will increase, thus building stronger thought processes in regards to skill

required for school administrators. Stronger partnerships can be made for mentoring and

socialization opportunities (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Milstein & Krueger, 1997)

and curriculum can be adapted to address current issues in educational leadership while

developing internship opportunities for more beneficial real-world learning.

This chapter provides an overview of past and present literature and research on

assistant principals and their preparation for the complex role of educational

administration. The literature review suggests the need for change in many areas of

preparation programs. The following chapter will discuss my data collection methods for

investigating preparation programs through the experiences of seven first year assistant

principals.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Data Collection

The first chapter explained that the purpose of the study was to determine how school districts and universities can better prepare and support first year assistant principals. The second chapter provided a review of literature and research on the need for educational leaders, the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals, how universities and school districts currently prepare assistant principals, and how school districts and universities should work together for preparation programs. This chapter describes the research methods used to examine the purpose of the study and answer research questions.

Data collection in this study focuses upon qualitative research techniques of focus group discussions and online reflective journal entries prompted by the researchers. Research began in September of 2006 and concluded in March of 2007. The study consisted of three focus group meetings and four online reflective journal entries over the seventh month period. Focus groups met in September, January and March. Reflective journal entries were sent in October, November, January, and February. The qualitative approach of this study coded the materials for themes and motifs as well as discretion purposes (Richards, 1997). The assistant principals' experiences and reflections will be studied for meaning and visible interpretations (Denzin, 2001).

Participants

With the completion of the research design, the next necessary step to initiate research was recruiting qualified participants. The participants were recruited using a convenience sampling. The Education Administration program at State University was contacted for recent graduates entering the field as assistant principals. The university was chosen for its location and student population. The university is home to over 11,353 students with two Dallas area locations and provided the researcher with a multitude of school districts within the area for participants. After receiving a list of recent graduates from the Education Administration program, I contacted participants via email. The email had the study's purpose, processes, time requirements, and confidentiality statements as well as a request for participation. Those interested responded to the email and were added to the list of participants.

Once selected, participants received the consent form (see Appendix B) informing potential participants of the study's purpose, processes, ensuring complete confidentiality and minimal risk to the participate throughout the study. The consent form was mailed to each potential participant. All consent forms were collected and stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's office.

After receiving all the consent forms and having signed permission for participation in the study, I sent out a demographics questionnaire (see Appendix C) for the participants to fill out and return via email individually. The questionnaire asked the participant for the number of years they have worked in education, if they were employed with their current school district before taking the assistant principal position, how long they worked within

that specific school district before becoming an assistant principal and how many total assistant principals were on their campuses. All of the participants' responses were then compiled and presented in Table 1. This table provides the code names for each participant and these names will be referenced throughout the paper to ensure confidentiality of participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Years in Education	In-district Hire	Years in District	Total Campus Assistant Principals
Mr. Hughes	6-11	Yes	5	3
Mr. Smith	6-11	No	--	1
Ms. Irwin	1-5	Yes	4	4
Mr. Redding	1-5	Yes	5	2
Mr. Matthews	6-11	Yes	4	3
Ms. Taylor	12-16	Yes	15	1
Ms. Clark	6-11	No	--	1

Participating in the study were seven first year assistant principals, all of whom have graduated from the Educational Leadership Master's Program at State University. Of the seven participants, four were male and three were female. Four middle schools, two high schools, and one elementary school from six different North Dallas school districts were represented among our participants. These six districts range in size, population, and student enrollments. I have used pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of each school district represented by our participants. Table 2 lists information from each participant's school district. Districts are described by the school district's participant, code name, setting, grade level of the campus, campus enrollment, and total district student enrollment. The district setting represents the type of community each school serves. In Table 2, when discussing a district, I used the district name followed at times by "ISD" which is short for independent school district.

Table 2

District Demographics

Participant Name	District Name/ Setting	Campus Enrollment	District Enrollment
Mr. Hughes	Ford ISD-suburban Middle School	661	20,081
Mr. Smith	Adams ISD-rural Middle School	423	1,505
Ms. Irwin	Eisenhower ISD-rural High School	1,835	12,573
Mr. Redding	Lincoln ISD-urban High School	990	49, 186
Mr. Matthews	Lincoln ISD-suburban Middle School	1,041	49, 186
Ms. Taylor	Pierce ISD-suburban Elementary School	751	52,816
Ms. Clark	Truman ISD-rural Middle School	369	2,406

Confidentiality was used throughout the study to minimize any potential risk to the participant. Because participants met with other participants within the focus group meetings, any information shared from focus group meetings was coded for confidentiality purposes. Pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity for participants and their contributions to the discussions. Code names were used for each participant throughout the study. All email addresses and information within these emails was

accessible to only the researcher in this study. All consent forms, email reflections, audiotapes, and transcriptions were kept in a locked cabinet in my office.

Beginning of the School Year

The first focus group meeting was held in September in a conference room on the campus of State University. Three study participants were present along with two researchers with one serving as a scribe and the other a facilitator. Two male middle school assistant principals, Mr. Hughes and Mr. Smith and one female high school assistant principal, Ms. Irwin, were in attendance for the focus group. Two other participants, both male, one an assistant principal in a middle school, Mr. Matthews, the other serving a high school, Mr. Redding, were unable to attend the discussion but submitted answers to the facilitator's questions previous to the focus group event. The session was tape recorded while the participants discussed three key questions. The facilitator opened the discussion by following protocol and reading a script (see Appendix D). The facilitator then led the group in discussion of the three key questions.

Responsibilities

The first question the facilitator gave asked participants to describe their responsibilities as assistant principals. With two months of experience, they described over thirty different responsibilities. The majority of participants stated handling textbooks, conducting teacher observations, supervising students during extracurricular events, working on attendance with student truancy, and dealing with discipline as consistent responsibilities in their position. Ms. Irwin, a small rural district assistant principal, described her division of the duties among her assistant principals:

We [the assistant principals on her campus] are each in charge of a department. I am in charge of the English department...all TAKS tests, tutorials, and so forth. [I'm] also in charge of textbooks...cheerleaders, dance team, bogs boys [spirit group of boys on her campus]...lunch duty two hours every day...bus duty...teachers' lesson plans and evaluations.

Similar to Ms. Irwin, our male high school participant, Mr. Redding, shared some of the same responsibilities:

My primary responsibility has been discipline due to extreme need, but during each passing period, I go into the halls to monitor students.... I also monitor the cafeteria before school, for two lunch periods, and then after school. After school I stay outside to monitor the bus pick up. I also do textbooks.

Our two male large district assistant principals responded separately through email. Both shared tasks such as grade level discipline, bus, lunch, and before-school duties as well as supervision for school events.

Others mentioned responsibilities that included tasks from the mundane to the more significant tasks such as updating the school's marquee signs, handling maintenance repairs, assigning teacher duties and keys, monitoring students, working with counselors, and supervising department meetings. The other participants mentioned other managerial responsibilities which occur more sporadically within the school year. For example, three participants described their role dealing with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), a test given to 3-11th graders on specific school dates to test for basic grade level and state wide curriculum objectives. Each participant is

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responsible for the organization and administration tasks such as preparing testing procedures, supervising the exam as well as analyzing the results.

The tasks vary upon the different campuses represented by our participants. In Lincoln ISD, a large suburban district, assistant principals have the responsibility of entering their school data in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Both participants within this school district had to enter in attendance, discipline, and student information into the database. Other participants not in Lincoln ISD had district or individual school employees to enter such data. Mr. Smith, is the first assistant principal in his school, so many of the tasks the other participants conduct, he does not because they have been delegated to another Adams ISD employee on his campus. Early in the year, Mr. Smith described his responsibilities at his small rural middle school as being different from other participants:

> Mine's a little different. This is the first full year that there has been an [assistant principal] in my school. There is not a formal guideline for what my responsibilities are. I handle all discipline. I guess you can say I am a sounding board with the principal, and I feel like I have gotten involved in more things than I would otherwise. I am evaluating half the staff; it's forming.

Despite working in different campuses and districts, many of the responsibilities discussed in the focus group were alike in that most assistant principals shared similar managerial tasks.

Fulfillment Within Role

After discussing the participants' numerous responsibilities within the assistant principal role, I posed a new question for the participants. Participants were asked to describe what a fulfilling day would be in their current assistant principal position. Jokingly the initial response from the group was to complete parts of their to-do list. After the lighthearted discussion of the never ending-tasks, the participants focused more on what "fulfilling" means to them. The majority stated that a fulfilling day included working with and supporting teachers in addition to getting to know the students. As one participant described it, "'Fulfilling' is helping the teachers find a way to better reach and teach our students." Building upon Mr. Smith's comment, Mr. Hughes added:

Being a servant….I think that's what you are there for, to help those teachers. Coming from the classroom you aren't so far removed that you know the pains they are going through.

For the only female present in the focus group discussion, Ms. Irwin added, "I think I find myself the happiest when I am in the classroom, seeing teachers connect with their students." Quality time with teachers and students not in the disciplinarian role seemed to be a major part of the participants' responses. For Mr. Matthews, a large district middle school participant 'fulfilling' meant spending time with all kinds of students, "Being able to see the students with troubles and the students without troubles" while Mr. Redding, our large district,

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high school participant enjoyed "having some quality time to spend counseling some of our students as a mentor in a way."

Support Systems

The final question for the first focus group meeting asked participants to describe a support system for administrators at their school or within their district. Each district was found to have different programs in place or none at all for beginning assistant principals. Our participants discussed a variety of support systems, from leadership academies, peer relationships, or to having no support system in place. Participant in Ford ISD was part of a preparation program for district teachers wanting to pursue a career in administration. The program serves as a source of resources and networking among district administrators. As he described it:

> Really it's more where they [faculty] try to get you to meet administrative staff and central office, and provide you with a lot of information as far as norms of the district. Through the program I made connections. They call randomly and check on me, and sometimes they send me articles to read or look at.

Previous to the start of the school year, both participants in Lincoln ISD, an urban district consisting of forty-nine thousand students, attended a leadership academy for new administrators. There, both participants received district information and training. Mr. Smith, Ms. Irwin, and Ms. Clark, all small rural assistant principals did not attend any leadership academies or training as their district did not provide them with any formal preparation efforts.

Ongoing support from school districts was also discussed within the focus group. Participants from Ford, Lincoln, and Pierce ISDs mentioned that their districts hold monthly meetings for assistant principals throughout the school year. At these meetings assistant principals network, discuss district information, and have book studies, and guest speakers on different topics. Participants also discussed informal support systems. All four middle school assistant principals discussed how they would seek out answers and suggestions from their principals and peers. While two participants, Ms. Irwin and Ms. Clark, both without a support system in place wished they had more support. For one female in a small district high school, she was one of those participants without anything in place. She described her original experience when she was an intern at her current school as very supportive in comparison to the lack of support she currently faced as a first year assistant principal:

> They [administrative staff] were always like, are you okay, you got this? How was that for you? They would always check on me and make sure everything was going well. My principal would say, 'come on in; let's talk.' He always did that with me last year. But this year, um, it's not that way…I wish I had some guidance and just once a week meet and if you have questions, but there is nothing in place.

Occupational Challenges

The second set of data was collected in an email response during the month of October. Because of the open communication and shared opinions in the focus groups, I used email reflections to gain perspectives and opinions that would be kept confidential.

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Focus groups allow participants to work towards a group consensus that may not truly reflect a participant's thoughts. I emailed each participant confidentially with a reflection question to respond via email. The October email question asked the participants to describe an interesting challenge they had faced in the position of assistant principal. The participants were given a deadline to respond and email back to the researcher. After all responses were collected, the data were sorted and compiled for analysis.

The discussion had a variety of responses given the diversity of student demographics for each school. All participants responded with exception of Ms. Clark. The majority of participants expressed frustration with different discipline situations. Many of their challenges involved working with difficult students and parents.

For our female high school principal, her challenge arose from lack of follow through in a discipline situation. A student had been disrespectful to a teacher and was sent to the office to sit outside Ms. Irwin's office. While waiting for her, the student was yelling at others walking by. When Ms. Irwin asked him to be quiet, he chose to continue yelling, so the participant walked the student to In School Suspension (ISS). She then tried to contact the parents to inform them of the situation but all current phone numbers for the family were out of service. She later found a new number and tried calling on her way home from work. Later that night, the student who she had sent to ISS called her back saying he was checking the caller identification (ID) on his home phone. Later that evening, Ms. Irwin received a lewd phone call from the student. She later reported it to the campus police officer and filed a case on him. She informed her principal of the situation and he said that if she had any more problems with him to send him to the

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discipline center. That same day while the student was supposed to serve ISS, another assistant principal let him out of the suspension by working out a deal with the student after he had been sent to the office for not complying with ISS rules. Ms. Irwin's frustration was from the lack of follow from administration. She expected him to be sent to the discipline center, like her principal said, upon his misbehavior in ISS. She later added, "I learned to live with the decision. The student is still on our campus. He just grins every time he sees me, and my stomach just cringes."

For our Lincoln ISD middle school assistant principal, Mr. Matthew's challenging situation was similar in that it too involved working with a student who would not comply with administration requests. He had been working on a Child Protective Services (CPS) case with a student who had been enrolled under false information by parents who were running from the law. The child had been left at school and was considered emotionally disturbed. The U.S. Marshals were called and later arrived to handle the situation. However, upon their arrival the student broke down and refused to leave, crying for hours. Mr. Matthews was unable to move or reason with the child and left him to cry while scheduling staff members to keep an eye on the student. After several hours, CPS arrived and attempted to remove the student unsuccessfully. Mr. Matthews then brought in the police and campus officer to assist in the transport of the student. The participant gave the student the option of walking out with the CPS workers or being escorted by the police. The student chose to walk out on his own.

Our Lincoln and Eisenhower ISD participants' challenging situation differs from that of Mr. Smith our small, rural, middle school participant, whose challenge occurred

from lack of communication at the district level. His challenge was a result of having a different leadership set up due to being in a smaller district. He described the confusion and conflicts that have resulted in the lack of clear supervision expectations for extracurricular activities. During high school football season, a duty roster was presented by the athletic director and given to all elementary, middle, and high school administrators. On opening night, a night that the participant was not assigned to work, he attended the game with his principal and left early. Upon the game's completion the participant was called by an administrator and asked to help remove students from the bleachers. When the participant informed the administrator that he had already left, the other administrator did not react well. Again the very next football game, the participant was again not scheduled to work but found himself with a job despite the duty schedule. He describes his frustration below:

> The communication between the high school and middle school needs to improve. We have to work too closely together on things for our communication to be limited. I operate much better when there are clear expectations on areas where middle school and high school share responsibilities. This challenge may seem trivial. However, I could see things growing from this particular incident if it is not addressed.

For Mr. Redding, a large district high school assistant principal, his challenge arose from a discipline situation with a student. He described a situation where a student began the school year as a discipline issue and since then the participant had been working to establish a connection with the student and develop a caring relationship with

him. In the story he shared the student violated a dress code expectation by sagging his pants below his natural waist line. Our participant took him in a private room to have the student adjust his pants with a belt. When the student left the room he called his parent upset that he had to fix his pants. Mr. Redding then received an angry phone call from the parent claiming our participant was racist. As he described it,

The dad went off on me...I, of course, kept going back to why we have the rule and we are to enforce it. He also told me has was pressing charges against me for harassment of his son and asking him to raise his shirt. I eventually calmed him down and thought it was over until he came to the school later that evening during a function and made a huge scene at the front office and then proceeded to verbally attack me.

Many of the challenges provided in the email reflections developed from lack of communication among staff members or as a result of discipline situations. Because discipline is a major element of the assistant principal position, many of these challenges can and will arise for our participants.

Professional Aspirations

In November, another email response was sent to the participants via email. I emailed each participant confidentially with a reflection question to respond to. The November email response asked participants to describe their professional aspirations. The participants were given a deadline to respond and email back to the researcher. Six of the seven participants responded to the email. Ms. Clark, the female middle school assistant principal, was the only participant

unable to respond. After all responses were collected, the data was sorted and compiled for analysis. While each participant shared his or her individual goals, they all had one similarity. Each participant wanted to be a principal of his or her own school. Most discussed a three to five year plan for becoming a principal. The one common goal of becoming a principal is where the similarity ends.

Upon obtainment of the principal position, each participant has different long term goals. Mr. Matthews, a male middle school assistant principal wants to pursue a Ph.D. and eventually end his education career at the college level. Mr. Smith and Mr. Redding want to work for district administration in Human Resources. Both participants share an interest for recruiting and hiring quality teachers. After working in Human Resources, Mr. Redding has the desire in becoming a superintendent for the purpose of advocating for education and helping create good policy. After working in the high school setting, our female participant Ms. Irwin would like to return to school and focus her learning on elementary schools in hopes of pursuing an elementary school principal position. Mr. Hughes, a large district, male middle school assistant principal looks forward to a future principal position and whatever the future brings in his education career. He describes his ambitions in the following comment:

Right now I am learning to spread my wings in this new role....I continue to provide ideas and constructive criticism of the teachers.... I truly believe my next step will be as a principal of a middle school where I will have the ability and privilege to lead the campus to great things. That

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should happen in less than five years. After that I am not sure what roads

I will travel or where I will end up. I love my job. I see myself in

education all of my days. There is simply no better profession in the

world.

For many participants, the assistant principal is a stepping stone for leadership

positions they one day hope to call their own.

<div align="center">Middle of the School Year</div>

Attraction to the Position

The second focus group meeting took place in January 2007. Participants and

researchers met in a conference room on State University's campus. Six of the seven

participants and two researchers were present for the discussion. Mr. Matthews, the large

district middle school assistant principal, was unable to attend the focus group but later

responded to focus group questions via email. The session was tape recorded while

participants discussed the main key questions. The facilitator opened the discussion by

following protocol and reading a script (see Appendix E). The facilitator then led the

group in discussion of the three key questions.

The purpose of this focus group was to compare the participants' thoughts on

their positions at the beginning of the school year to those thoughts in January after

having a semester of experience. The first question posed in the focus group asked

participants to describe their initial attraction for the assistant principal position. Each

participant spoke about wanting to have an impact on the educational field as their initial

attraction. However, the areas of impact varied among participants. For our female

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elementary school participant, Ms. Taylor, she knew at an early age that she wanted to be an educator and some day an administrator. Mr. Smith, Ms. Irwin, and Mr. Redding all spoke of wanting to work with students whereas Mr. Hughes, Ms. Clark, and Ms. Taylor wanted to make an impact with the teachers.

After discussing the participants' initial attraction to the position, I then asked the focus group if their attraction had changed now having been in the role of assistant principal for half a school year. For the majority, the attraction had not changed after gaining experience in the position. From the participants' responses, the attraction for their jobs has increased. When asked about his attraction, Mr. Hughes shared similar feelings of other participants in the focus group.

I think that for me it's intensified. I think that as I've begun to gain confidence and be able to speak to my peers, I can see that I am beginning to make an impact on some of the teachers as I see some of the changes that I have suggested or that looked at different research or talked about different ideas or so forth....but as I am seeing changes for the good of the students, I think it has intensified my love for my job.

Or as Mr. Matthews, our large district middle school participant stated, "[My expectations] have not changed that much. I LOVE THIS STUFF! I don't even call what I do work anymore. I am where I am supposed to be." For Mr. Smith and Ms. Taylor, our female elementary assistant principal and our male rural middle school participants, their attractions have sped up the desire to be a building principal sooner than their original thoughts. Both Ms. Irwin and Ms.

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Clark, our smaller more rural district assistant principals expressed feeling stronger and more confident in their leadership role.

> I just got stronger and more confident. We have a lot of discipline issues in our building so that is what the majority of my time is doing. I have just gotten more confident, and like Mr. Hughes said, I have more time to be out there, be with the kids and the teachers becoming better everyday and making a better impression on the kids and adults in my building.

The participants' attraction to their assistant principal position had not changed despite time within the field. They found their experiences to validate their original appeal for the assistant principalship.

Support

The next focus group question was a follow up question from the first focus group. I wanted to pursue the question about support systems from the first focus group to see if any changes had been made for those who had or lacked a support system at the beginning of the school year. I asked participants to share what support systems they have in place now or who do they turn to for support. In the first focus group meeting both female participants in smaller districts, Ms. Irwin and Ms. Clark voiced that they did not have a formal support system, and now, both still lack a formal support system but have enlisted the support of colleagues when in need. Because there was not a support system in place for our female high school assistant principal, she went and assigned her own colleague to serve as her support system.

> I kind of told Brice [another administrator] he would be my support system. So
> that if I have a problem, I don't go home with it. I want to be able to vent at work
> and make sure I made the right decision. Of course, I have my English department
> that I was in charge of. They talk and I listen. Little things like that where I
> support them; they support me.

Ms. Irwin wanted to ensure she had support not only for emotional relief but also in her
decision making.

Our female in a small rural district middle school, Ms. Clark is the only assistant
principal on her campus. She chose to seek out her principal as her source of support and
an assistant principal with whom she had her graduate internship with the previous year.
When asked to describe his support system in September, Mr. Redding, a male high
school assistant principal replied with "at my school, there is not one. Everyone is caring
and supportive interpersonally, but we are all so busy that there is no time to ask for
assistance." Since then he has sought different individuals for support:

> There have been two other individuals that I have called at different campuses,
> more so about investigating discipline. I have an awesome principal that I am
> learning from. I can of course go to him anytime and bounce ideas off of him.

In addition to the individual support systems described by participants, some also
have leadership team meetings on their campus. Mr. Hughes and Ms. Taylor, both from
large well-developed districts, meet with their principal, other campus assistant
principals, and counselors to discuss the situations or provide time to ask questions or
vent. Other participants attend monthly district administration meetings where assistant

principals can discuss current issues and build relationships that serve as sources of support. Pierce ISD offers a monthly meeting for new assistant principals, and there they meet and receive training. Ms. Taylor, our female elementary principal stated:

> They [Pierce ISD] train you on all the ins and outs of the district and their expectations-management, laws, just about every topic you could have, and they give you this really great notebook with all the topics in it, with the names and numbers of people you can call in case there is an emergency. So that's a relief. If I don't know the answer to something, I can always ask.

Preparation Efforts

With each participant having half a school year's experiences to reflect upon, I wanted to see how their experiences and academic course work of their graduate program had influenced their role as assistant principals. I asked participants to discuss how both experience and graduate school affected their transition to the assistant principal position. A majority of the participants were able to highlight specific topics in graduate course work that proved beneficial in their position. For our female, large district, elementary assistant principal, she was impressed with the current research and topics of discussion with her coursework, "When I went to my classes, I was really pleasantly surprised that everything we were studying at my principal meetings, I was already reading it or had read it. So I thought that really said a lot." Building upon the research discussion, several participants discussed the university's suggested textbooks.

All three female participants mentioned using a practitioner book as a resource for managerial help.

The majority of the participants discussed the importance of real life and practical learning experiences proving to be more beneficial for the first of the school year. As our male rural middle school assistant principal added, "I think there needs to be more of the day to day practical stuff" in preparation programs. Ms. Clark, Mr. Smith, Mr. Matthews, and Mr. Redding all spoke of the real life stories and experiences shared by the faculty and adjunct professors who worked as administrators in the community. Each participant found them to be applicable to their situation. The majority also preferred the mixture of faculty and current administrators who taught the courses. Mr. Smith later added:

> I liked that there were a mixture of people….there were principals or faculty on
>
> staff….You can relate to the ones that were out in the field-they would bring their
>
> stories and things. It was a good mixture.

While most of the participants added to the discussion on what were the benefits of graduate work, one participant felt the opposite. Because he was unable to attend, Mr. Matthews later emailed the researcher his responses to the focus group questions. He did not feel that his course work did a lot to influence his role. He felt that many of his classes were spent "going through the motions of rounding me as a scholar" rather than preparing him for the field of administration. He later stated that his experiences in graduate school have influenced him as a leader.

> I still recall conversations with specific professors that have helped me through
>
> some rough times. I also recall stories told by many professors that prepared me

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for becoming an assistant principal. These conversations were usually off topic and described life experiences of the professors when they were principals. He found these conversations and stories to be more helpful and influential than the textbooks, discussions, and research mentioned by other participants.

The next question posed to the group of participants focused on ways educational programs could better prepare novice assistant principals. I wanted participants to discuss what they would change about their graduate experiences that would have better prepared them for the role this year. The suggestions made from the group were based on more of the practical experiences they face in their positions. For example, all three middle school participants in Ford, Truman, and Adams ISDs suggested more focus on special education. Ms. Clark, our female middle school assistant principal added:

> I also think there needs to be more practical things…I think with our position there were some things that would help. Like 504 and special education ins and outs, like stuff that we have to do that's real and important, that they throw you in there and your butts on the line if you screw up and you really don't know what you are doing.

Research was another topic for improvement from several participants. Participants recommended that more class work needs to focus on the research process, how to research, steps involved, collecting data, how to read, analyze, and present data. Mr. Redding added to the discussion with the suggestion that every graduate student write a research paper in order to learn all the areas of research.

Interviewing, hiring processes, and dealing with personnel were also classroom topics desired by the participants. Mr. Smith voiced that there should be a class on or that covers interviewing skills. Both female assistant principals, Ms. Taylor and Ms. Clark agreed that interviewing should be discussed because it is crucial for running a school. Ms. Taylor later added:

> I think there is a challenge in regards to how to hire the best candidate and how to increase student achievement. If you don't have the right people then the children aren't going to achieve. So to me those are two things we need to focus on.

Building upon the opinions Mr. Smith, Ms. Clark, and Ms. Taylor, Mr. Hughes suggested adding coursework on working with inadequate employees. He recommended having discussions on "how to cut the ties with people you don't want on your campus." His addition to the dialogue created another topic of discussion which Mr. Redding coined, "controversial conversations." All participants agreed that difficult conversations with parents and employees occur almost daily in their schools and having graduate classes or texts that discuss having such conversations would have been beneficial.

Professional Growth

The next set of data was collected in an email response also during the month of January. I again emailed each participant confidentially with a reflection question to respond via email. The January email question asked the participants to share how they felt themselves develop professionally as an assistant principal. The participants were given a deadline to respond and email back to the researcher. Six of the seven participants responded. Ms. Clark, middle school assistant principal, was unable to respond. After all

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responses were collected, the data was sorted and compiled for analysis. While each participant admitted to growing in a multitude of ways, there was one common area in which a majority of the participants shared as a similar area for growth; focusing on the big picture rather than one classroom like when they taught. Adam ISD's middle school assistant principal best described it in his response on the big picture:

I have learned to look at a school in a much more global way. As a teacher you see the school with narrow vision. There is so much else that goes on during the day that classroom teachers have no idea exists. Whether it is instruction, curriculum, maintenance, facilities, safety, discipline, or the relationships between all those associated with the school....I feel I have grown enormously.

Ms. Taylor, the elementary assistant principal from a large district shared similar thoughts in her professional development explanation.

I am a totally different person! No longer do I envision a single classroom of students; instead I perceive a bigger picture with a greater responsibility of educating 620 students, their parents and 83 teachers. Everyday I have opportunity to grow professionally through district principals' training/committees, book studies on administrative leadership and student management seminars.

Another growth area for participants was dealing with time management, curriculum alignment, and relationship skills. Mr. Hughes identified this area for his professional development response stating:

I am also much more comfortable in conflict. A good portion of my job has been

to be a sounding board for upset parents or teachers....like the customer service

department at a large store. I can actually feel myself getting better in these

situations the more they occur.

Others discussed growth in areas of counseling, patience, and special education. Ms.

Irwin, our female high school assistant pirncipal, discussed how she grew over the year

with her next statement. "I have grown rapidly....I feel that I have learned to be patient

and that no matter how young you are, the teachers will respect decisions you make if

you are consistent in your decision making." All participants stated they felt they had

grown and were making a difference in their school.

Professional Plans for Upcoming School Year

February was the last month for reflective email responses. The reflective

question was emailed to all participants individually to ensure confidentiality and asked

participants to respond in a timely manner. Upon collection of the responses, I read and

analyzed the reflective replies. The February reflective question asked the participants to

share their professional plans for next year. The participants were given a deadline to

respond and email back to the researcher. Five of the seven participants responded to the

email. Mr. Matthews and Ms. Clark did not respond. After responses were collected, the

data were sorted and compiled for analysis. Most of the participants shared that they

would be staying in their current positions as assistant principals for the upcoming school

year. All the male participants will remain in the same position for the school year with

the goal of continuing to make an impact. Middle school assistant principal, Mr. Hughes' future plans revolved around organization and growing in areas where he is not as strong.

Next year I hope to make adjustments to what I have done this year. Those adjustments start with organization. Organization is key to being able to utilize the limited amount of time you have to make a difference for the students and staff. I have set goals for myself to grow more as an instructional leader in departments other than math (I believe I am a strong instructional leader for the math department but need to branch out and learn more about best practices in other areas as well). I also want to find ways to make connections with the students.

Like Mr. Hughes, Mr. Smith will remain in his current position, but plans on taking on new tasks for the following school year.

As far as next year I want to continue to grow in my work. I want to experience new things that were not under my control this year like being responsible for all 504 students. I also want to start the year off giving students the expectations for attendance.

In February, when the email question was posed, our female high school participant, Ms. Irwin had applied for positions in the administration office of her district.

I have applied for positions that have opened up in the administration office. I definitely see myself as taking steps on the 'education ladder.' I do want to grow professionally. I don't see myself as stagnant water. I want to succeed in obtaining greater responsibilities to help our young society succeed.

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After a follow-up email with her in May, she is going to "stick it out for a couple of more years; we have a new principal coming in, so we will see what kind of changes are going to be made." When asked about her professional plans for next year, our female participant from a large suburban district, Ms. Taylor discussed her anticipation for a principal's position in the future and her goals for her personal education. While waiting for a principal position, she will begin her doctoral study in Education Leadership. She wrote:

> Each day I seek new experiences, challenges and risks that enhance professional growth. It is important for me to abandon my comfort zone, accept critical challenges and responsibilities that significantly impact student achievement…as I move toward the spring semester as assistant principal, I believe the best is yet to come.

This past May I also wanted to follow up with our oldest female participant. I emailed her about an update for her plans the upcoming school year. She had recently accepted a principal position within her current district.

<div align="center">End of the School Year</div>

Making Decisions

The third and final focus group meeting took place in March of 2007. Three participants, all male, and two researchers were present at the meeting. The focus group took place in a conference room on State University's campus. The session was tape recorded while participants discussed the main key questions. The facilitator opened the

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discussion by following protocol and reading a script (see Appendix F). The facilitator then led the group in discussion of the key questions.

All three male middle school assistant principals were present for the discussion. Mr. Redding, Ms. Taylor, Ms. Irwin, and Ms. Clark were unable to attend the focus group meeting. The purpose of this focus group was to identify how participants made decisions on their campuses and strategies used for making the decision.

This discussion was unique in that much of the discussion was individualized. Participants were dealing with different dynamics and situations for change and decisions. For Mr. Smith, our male middle school assistant principal in a small, newer district, his area of focus for change involved the school's truancy policy and enforcement. When he stepped into his position there was not any attendance or truancy procedures. When asked how he recognized the issue and how he went about making changes, Mr. Smith mentioned that he had looked at the data from the previous year and had talked with previous administrators about truancy. Upon seeing the data, he wanted to make a change. So he then began to familiarize himself with the process, parties involved, and making changes.

> I showed up this year and there was no set thing in place ....Since then I have met
>
> the new JP that was elected and we got truancy things going on with those kids
>
> but before then kids just missed and missed and missed.

As mentioned in his February email reflection, attendance and truancy is one of Mr. Smith's areas for growth. After learning the process and using resources like the Justice of the Peace, he explained the process to the group and what he has started putting in

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place for truancy procedures for parent communication and accountability. While he worked with truancy procedures, the other participants were implementing change in other ways.

Mr. Matthews, our male suburban middle school assistant principal, described a situation where he had to work with an inadequate teacher. He explained that within the first week of school he received complaints from a multitude of parents and students, asking to be removed from this teacher's Physical Education class. After verifying the complaints were legit, both Mr. Matthews and his principal decided to work very close with her. They put the teacher on a growth plan which consisted of resources like Harry Wong videos and workshops. He and his principal worked with the teacher for over three months with weekly visits to her classroom. She attended all the workshops and training lined out for her but was not improving. "There was no transfer of knowledge from the growth plan to the classroom… We spent as much time as we could and realized that nothing is being transferred." The principal and the participant decided that they would file a non-renewal for this teacher. The participant had to inform her of the process. He had to explain all the procedures and the possible results of being terminated. When given the opportunity to resign, the teacher chose to go through the process.

Mr. Matthews did not receive much resistance from the individuals who were involved in his implementing change, whereas, Mr. Hughes met some resistance when attempting to implement a new change in his TAKS tutorial program. He described a change when he took initiative to change the logistics of a program that he had felt needed changing for some time. After discussing and gaining approval from his principal,

he made the changes. His school hired a gentleman to come in and work with students three days a week in small groups.

> For years he would work with our worry kids -students who the staff thinks are not going to be successful on a TAKS test or not have a very good chance of being successful I guess.

He chose to change the pull out program where the tutor worked with what he referred to as "bubble students" which are students who passed the TAKS test by one or two questions. He found the biggest issue for the change to be with some of the teachers. "Some teachers used the tutor as a dumping ground where they didn't have to worry about those tutorials....They let somebody else do it and if they failed then it really wasn't their fault. This is why we had to change our philosophy."

When discussing his change, I asked the participant why he felt it necessary to change the program. He shared with the group that there was a lack of interest on the teachers' part to pursue tutoring beyond regular school hours.

> After attending math department meetings, I felt that our math teachers on our campus especially in 6th and 7th grades, teachers really weren't motivated to want to tutor any earlier or longer then when their contract time begins and ends at the end of the day. And I did not feel they were given their all and making sure all their students were successful. So I was trying to find a way to make them more accountable.

The second focus group question focused upon handling difficult decisions. I asked participants to describe a difficult situation and how they went about handling it.

Unlike the previous question when each participant's response and change differed from the others, this question had one similarity. Both difficult decisions described by the participants revolved around discipline. Mr. Smith, Adam's ISD male middle school principal, shared a discipline situation about two boys in the band hall. The two boys got into a quarrel and started fighting when the band director enters the room and the actions from the two boys stop. The participant handled the situation by assigning both boys detention but not In School Suspension (ISS). Upon calling the parents of each student and informing them of the disciplinary action, one set of the parents is fine; the other wants to challenge the participant's decision. She scheduled an appointment to come in but ended up canceling and he never heard anything about it again. However, what makes the situation difficult for the participant is when and where discretion comes into play for making decisions. In this instance he informed the principal of his decision and gained approval. However, he stressed that assistant principals can't take every decision to the principals. He stated, "It's one of those where discretion part is that you have to be able to back up what it is that you are doing on your own that tends to be difficult." Similar to this Mr. Smith's situation, Mr. Hughes found most of his difficult decisions focusing on discipline as well.

I mean outside of discipline I really don't have any difficulties. The issue I talked about earlier [TAKS tutorial program] was difficult because I knew there would be resistance to it but it went over really well. Really I can't think of anything other than discipline stuff where there are parents that

aren't understanding or seeing your sides of things or why you're making

the decisions you're making.

Participants found discipline situations to be the most difficult decisions they

faced. They added that discipline situations require decision making in not only

how to handle the students but also their parents in many cases.

Suggestions for Preparation

The discussion on discipline soon transitioned into more suggestions for

preparation programs based upon the lack of training on specific roles such as discipline.

The preparation program dialogue between the three participants primarily focused upon

the lack of curriculum focus on the conflict resolution with students, parents, and staff

members. When asked how much time is spent with resolving conflict, all three male

middle school participants admitted to a majority of their time working with students

and/or parents over discipline or drama situations. For Lincoln ISD, a suburban well-

developed district, Mr. Matthews stated that 80 percent of his time is spent on discipline.

> I spend more time on conflict resolution. I spend a lot of time with when do I need
>
> to have my lawyer, my child has never done anything wrong, I want to see your
>
> investigation, I want to see this or that. I spend a lot of time on parent
>
> conversations.

All three highly recommended implementation of conflict resolution and discipline

strategies as part of their graduate coursework in addition to the other suggestions

mentioned in previous focus group meetings.

Upon the completion of data collection, the research was compiled, analyzed, and documented in this paper. After finishing the research paper a draft of the final paper was sent to each participant. I wanted to ensure I had represented the voices of each participant correctly. Participants, later, returned the paper with feedback.

In summary, data collection for the study focused upon two collection methods. Focus group discussions and online reflective journal entries were used to investigate the research questions. Participants were able to share experiences and perceptions in group and private confidential settings. When research was completed, I compiled data for themes and presented results in the discussion. A discussion of the data analysis will follow in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an on-going process throughout my study. From the initial

focus group meeting to the final focus group and online reflective journal entry, I

examined the data to identify themes or patterns from my participants' perspectives. The

purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data presented by participants. I used the

following questions as my guide for analyzing and structuring my research and data.

- What attracted individuals to the assistant principal position?

- How do assistant principals describe their roles and responsibilities?

- How do assistant principals describe the benefits of their preparation

  programs? In what ways did their university prepare students for the assistant

  principal position?

- How do assistant principals describe the benefits of the support they received

  within their districts?

- How might universities and school districts collaborate and work together for

  the preparation and support of first year assistant principals?

The purpose of the study was to determine how school districts and universities

can better prepare aspiring administrators for the assistant principal position. In order to

gain a better understanding of how to prepare future assistant principals, research was

needed on the assistant principal position. As a result, I wanted to answer the question of why our participants chose to become assistant principals. In the midst of their responses, one similar theme was apparent from their discussion in the second focus group. The major theme that emerged is that most of the assistant principals said their attraction to the assistant principal position was a result of their desire to have an impact on the educational field.

Initial Attractions

The literature review suggests that recruitment of qualified applicants for administration positions is difficult due to the positions' required work load, time demands, and lack of compensation (Howely, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The growing demands on administrators make the educational leadership position an unattractive profession (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Winter, 2002 ; Zellner, Jinkins, Gideon, Doughty, & McNamara, 2002). With what the literature says about a lack of interest and attraction for leadership positions, our participants' dialogue reflected the opposite. Despite the work loads, time demands, and lack of compensation, the seven participants' were still attracted to the assistant principal position as a "stepping stone" in achieving their career goal. All participants shared a similar trait in that they wanted to affect the educational experience of teachers and students. For our female of a large developed district and elementary school, Ms. Taylor, administration was a calling at an early age. For others, the desire for the position was based upon their passion for working with students while other participants wanted to help teachers.

The words "impact" and "influence" were referenced often in participants' descriptions of their attraction to the assistant principalship. For Mr. Smith, our male middle school assistant principal from a small rural district he "wanted to impact students at a different level" other than teaching. "I am excited about being able to influence some of the teachers on our staff," added a large district, male participant. Ms. Irwin, high school assistant principal added "I have always been a lifelong learner so I want to learn but I also want to make an impact in the education field." All of the participants' responses captured a consistent theme of wanting to make an impact in their schools.

Responsibilities

My second research question asked participants to share the roles and responsibilities they have within their position. From what the literature provides, we know that the role of the assistant principal is changing due to new demands on schools (Cranston, Troman, & Reugebrink, 2004; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Pounder & Merrill, 2001) and will continue to become more challenging (Chirichello, 2001; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Based upon what the literature tells us about the increasing complexity of the assistant principal position (Cranston, Troman, & Reugebrink, 2004) my second research question focused on assistant principal responsibilities. I asked participants to describe their responsibilities within their position. When sharing their responsibilities several patterns emerged in the dialogue.

Managerial Tasks. The literature suggests that assistant principals' primary responsibilities have generally focused on routine administrative tasks, custodial duties, and discipline that require never ending attention and effort (Chan, Webb, & Bowen,

2003; Glanz, 1994; Glanz, 2004; Mertz, 2000). According to my participants' responses, this suggestion holds true. They stated having managerial type tasks like handling textbooks, conducting teacher observations, supervising students during extracurricular events, working on attendance with student truancy, and dealing with discipline. Others studies revealed the majority of assistant principal responsibilities fall under discipline and other managerial tasks such as duties, attendance, student activities, staff support and evaluation, building supervision, and building operations (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Hausman, Nebeker, and McCreary, 2001; Mertz, 2000) Most of the day-to-day responsibilities discussed in focus groups and emails mentioned a majority of managerial type tasks.

Discipline. Another responsibility described by the literature and participants was discipline. Discipline was listed throughout the literature as consuming a majority of assistant principals' time (Glanz, 2004; Hausman, Nebeker, & McCreary, 2001; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Mertz, 2000; Weller & Weller 2002). Hausman, Nebeker, and McCreary (2001) as well as Weller and Weller (2002) have found that pupil discipline was the number one time-consuming activity for assistant principals. When asked in the final focus group to give a rough estimate of how their time is divided on a daily basis, all three male middle school assistant principal's stated that over half their time is spent dealing with discipline or situations related to discipline. Earlier in the study I asked participants to share a current challenge they were facing. Four out of the six responses discussed challenges that were related to discipline situations. Their responses about

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discipline confirm with what the literature states about discipline being a time consuming task for assistant principals.

Priorities. The dialogue on assistant principal responsibilities gave great illustrations for the realities of the position. The literature describes the assistant principal position as being very demanding in terms of time (Daresh, 2004). Assistant principals can pick up multiple jobs every hour (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). At any point an assistant principal can be assigned a new task that requires immediate attention, prolonging any other task previously assigned (Daresh, 2004). Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1995) found the responsibilities of assistant principals to be unrelenting and unpredictable and require attention every day the school is open. Like the literature, the participants described a need for multitasking within the position because of the multitude of tasks and situations that arise in the school setting. As Mr. Hughes shared, "The ability to multi-task is something that I quickly learned to do at a very high level." Ms. Clark added that "you have to know how to manage a lot of things or you will go nuts in this job." The pace of the position at times can be overwhelming. According to high school assistant principal, Mr. Redding, there "doesn't seem like there is enough time....We often don't have time to stop and eat." In many cases he finds himself working on the weekends in hopes to get paper work done. His comment reflects a general consensus among participants.

Division of Responsibilities. The other pattern of discussion focused upon the delegation of responsibilities among participants in larger and smaller districts. For those participants in Lincoln, Ford, Pierce, and Eisenhower School Districts, their

responsibilities had been delegated and assigned specifically to their position. Those four districts represent the largest district enrollment numbers in my study. The districts are well-developed and their strengths in organization were evident in the participants' responses. When responsibilities were shared in the first focus group, Ms. Irwin and Mr. Hughes, secondary assistant principals, both were able to list their responsibilities quickly as if mentally checking off their to-do lists as the tasks were verbalized in the focus group. Both participants were very aware of their responsibilities and expectations for their position.

In contrast, Mr. Smith, our participant from a small rural middle school in Adams ISD, did not have a defined set of responsibilities. Unlike the participants' responsibilities from the larger districts, his responsibilities are not as prescribed. He was the first assistant principal on his campus. Perhaps his position was new, many of the "normal" tasks listed by other participants had already been delegated to different Adams ISD personnel in previous years. Thus this participant did not have a formalized list of tasks. His lack of agenda was evident as he described his responsibilities in a more relaxed tone than the other large district participants who were out of breath upon finishing their descriptions of district responsibilities.

Ms. Clark, the small district middle school participant, was unable to attend two focus group meetings and respond to online reflective journal entries. Her absences and lack of engagement might be a direct result of the multitude of her responsibilities. Being the only campus assistant principal in a small rural district, there was no one to divide up her tasks.

Size Matters. The two different types of districts, the large, well-developed suburban district in comparison with the small rural one, require many different responsibilities for the assistant principal. Based upon the participants' responses, the well-developed districts had set lists and policies regarding specific responsibilities to assistant principals. Our female high school assistant principal discussed how her duties differed from the other assistant principals. The duties, supervision events, teacher observations, discipline concerns, and other responsibilities were divided among several administrators. The male middle school and high school participants in well-developed suburban districts also shared the division of tasks with a fellow assistant principal. While our female and male middle school assistant principals in smaller more rural districts, carried the load of tasks themselves. There wasn't a division of duties. There are not any other assistant principals to delegate to.

During a discussion on discipline in the third focus group, Mr. Smith described a discipline situation involving two boys who were rough housing. When selecting a consequence for the boys, Mr. Smith, considered the time of year in school year and the fact he had never seen these two boys as reasons for giving a less severe consequence. He then asked the other two male middle school principals what they would have done in that situation. Immediately, both large district assistant principals, were able to describe how they would handle the discipline based upon their school or district policy. Mr. Matthews and Mr. Hughes discussed district policy in terms of students fights, terminology used in solving fight situations, and the consequences that came with the different types of fights. Mr. Smith later added, "Now see that's where me being new

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comes to play. I've never done this before so I am trying to get some ideas here." His district did not have set policies for how to handle discipline. Mr. Smith had to "Learn on the fly of his pants." Mr. Hughes and Mr. Matthews were better equipped to handle discipline situations because they had set policies.

The size of the district plays a role in the types of responsibilities an assistant principal can have. When working in larger districts, more staff is needed to work with larger student populations. With the need for more staff members, the need for more administrators becomes necessary. Having multiple assistant principals can affect the list of responsibilities for each assistant principal. The few assistant principals can divide up the supervision events, meetings, and other time consuming tasks to ensure the coverage, supervision, and completion of tasks. The smaller districts share the same responsibilities but have fewer administrators to delegate with. Thus the assistant principals in smaller districts find themselves carrying all loads as our female middle school participant did.

University Preparation

There are numerous amounts of research on the preparation of school leaders (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Orr, 2006; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). Much of the literature discusses preparation of leaders at the university level (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). University programs have been found to play an important role in the preparation of school leaders (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Orr, 2006). My third research question focused upon the preparation

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efforts of university programs for preparing assistant principals. Now having a better understanding for the assistant principal position and the tasks and time commitments involved, I wanted to examine how universities prepare students to work within that role. All participants shared similar experiences in their graduate programs in that they all attended State University. They had similar classes and professors to base their opinions on their preparation program. My questions focused upon the benefits and suggestions for university preparation. Several themes emerged from participant responses.

Benefits of University Preparation

When asked to share about the benefits of their university program, participants stated several useful features. For many participants research topics were found to be valuable in their position. All three female participants stated using course textbooks or readings from graduate courses in their new administration position. The female elementary assistant principal in a large district found herself at a district assistant principal meeting where books she had read in her classes at State College were being referenced. The group agreed upon the need for current research in order to stay afresh with constant changes in education.

The two high school participants cited conducting research as a benefit in their graduate experiences. The literature is encouraging universities to center instruction on problem-based learning methods such as conducting research in order to solve campus problems (Clark & Clark, 1996; Jackson & Kelley, 2002). For Mr. Redding, knowing how to conduct research and manipulate data helped him with analyzing student data at his school. Both high school assistant principals recommended that graduate students

write a research paper to better prepare them for the administration field. Building upon the Ms. Irwin and Mr. Redding's research discussion, both the small district middle school participants, suggested having a year long research course which would introduce the concepts behind educational research and conclude with students conducting their own research and presenting it in paper form.

Several participants voiced appreciation for having current or former principals as classroom instructors. They discussed having a mixture of university faculty and current administrators in the area in their graduate courses. The literature suggests that preparation programs hire more faculty members with administration experience (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Jackson & Kelley; Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). The collaboration of key education stakeholders results in more comprehensive understanding and goals for preparing educational leaders (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Clark & Clark, 1996; Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). The combination of faculty and administrators provided an assortment of experiences, stories, and perspectives for graduate students to identify with. For one large district male assistant principal, Mr. Matthews found the greatest part of his graduate experience came from "real life experiences" that were shared from professors when they got off topic and discussed their experiences in the field and how they dealt with different situations. Mr. Smith, our small rural district assistant principal, found that he could "relate to the ones [principals] that were out in the field" and sharing stories. Based upon the responses, the participants preferred hearing real life examples and stories from current or former principals.

Suggestions for University Programs

As we discussed the different courses and experiences that were found to be beneficial for graduate students. I then asked participants what they would find most helpful in preparing them for the first year as an assistant principal. When asked this question, all participants had been in their position for six months and had enough knowledge of the role to reflect upon the question. One key theme emerged from participant responses. Most of the participants stated the need for practical experiences. As Mr. Smith, our male middle school participant in a small district put it, "There needs to be a little more of the day to day practical stuff." Mr. Smith shared in an earlier discussion that in many cases he "fakes it till he makes it" in his position. Because he lacked the experience and knowledge, Mr. Smith had to pretend he knew what he was doing until figuring it out. After thinking back to her first semester, Ms. Clark, our female small middle school assistant principal, added "The first semester, I just spent time keeping my head above water…the practical things are mainly the things I have needed to this point." Similar to the research, there is a push for an increase in practice based instruction for graduate students (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). Suggestions for practical instruction stem from the hope that university faculty might better prepare leaders by first revealing them to practical tasks and daily routines and then providing them with applicable research and scholarship that allows them to expand and critique their assumptions (Grogan & Andrews, 2003). By providing more hands-on learning approaches, future administrators won't have to worry about "keeping their heads above water."

Real-Life Application

Participants described the need and desire for instruction on discipline, conflict resolution, how to have difficult conversations, and how to interview. These were situations where a majority of the participants' workload fell, and they cited these areas as something that was not covered in their course load as much as they would have preferred. The participants' suggestion for these classroom topics are aligned with the literature. Research recommends that new courses should feature instruction on change, conflict resolution, delegation, teamwork, communication, and social and political aspects of schooling (Orr, 2006). Our large district high school participant added to the discussion, suggesting that courses offer more role-playing opportunities. Mr. Redding and other participants shared having a professor who gave them "real life" situations to role play, allowing the participants to step into that role and discuss their actions after. This professor was providing more practical, problem-based learning approaches. These teaching approaches allow students to experience, think, and discuss, gaining several perspectives and possible action plans (Milstein & Krueger, 1997).

Support Systems

Much of the literature on preparation programs focuses upon providing support systems (Dukess, 2001; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Normore, 2004, Sherman, 2005). Normore (2004) found "school administrators can not be expected to effectively embrace their roles and functions as school administrators without the appropriate support structures, resources, and training in place" (p.107). In order to create stronger support, the literature suggests the implementation of socialization opportunities through mentor

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relationships, cohort groups and networking (Daresh, 2004; Hausman, Nebecker, McCreary, & Donaldson, 2001; Normore, 2004). Normore (2004) found that socialization is a major component of leadership development and should begin in preparation programs or even before. However, school districts should continue to encourage socialization whether through mentoring, cohort groups, or staff development opportunities. Because State University did not have cohort groups at the time of this study, my participants were not able to reflect on this type of socialization experience.

My final research question focused on other socialization methods that serve as support systems once assistant principals were hired. The literature suggested mentoring, networking, and professional development activities as way for having novice assistant principals socialize with other administrators. I wanted to see what socialization methods were in place for the participants. After asking participants to share about where or whom they receive support in their position, the pattern of big versus small district came into play once again.

As discussed in the methods section of the paper, I asked the participants in the September focus group to share about their support systems. In the beginning of the year, our larger district participants with student populations over 20,000 discussed having district wide monthly meetings where assistant principals met for book studies, topical discussions, and presenters. There they received district support information, resources, and networked with other assistant principals. For Mr. Smith, Ms. Clark, and Ms. Irwin smaller more rural district administrators, there was no mention of district training or support efforts for those new in the role of administration. The small town participants

did not participate in monthly principal meetings or book studies like other participants mentioned in the focus group.

When asked about campus levels of support, participants discussed informal sources of support. For our female middle school and high school participants in smaller districts, they had to seek out their own sources of support. They asked colleagues to serve as their support system for guidance, venting, and perspective. Hausman, Nebeker, and McCreary (2001) found that peers "help new assistant principals make sense of their responsibilities and relationships through mentoring, memorable messages, explanations, and deliberate demonstrations" (p.142). Fortunately for Ms. Irwin and Ms. Clark, their peers were willing to give support. For other large district participants like our female elementary assistant principal, Ms. Taylor and two male middle school assistant principals, Mr. Hughes and Mr. Matthews, they reported having a great administrative team where they met weekly to discuss issues, concerns, and to provide an appropriate time to vent about the job. For our small rural middle school assistant principal, Mr. Smith had a more informal support system with his principal. If support was needed, he would consult his principal.

In her study, Dukess (2001) found that new administrators need a variety of support systems. In addition, school districts need to provide support for beginning administrators (Normore, 2005). One socialization approach mentioned in the literature focused on mentoring. Throughout the discussion on support systems, participants did not specify a specific assigned mentor relationship. Not one of the assistant principal participants had been formally assigned to an experienced mentor. In the case of Mr.

Matthews, Mr. Smith, and Ms. Clark, they chose to go to their principals for support and suggestions, but it is not an assigned support system with a weekly meeting. Their meetings with their principals take place on an as needed basis.

For the two female principals without formal support systems it was evident in that they would have preferred some of the support systems that other participants were describing. There were two instances where our female high school assistant principal voiced wanting more support. She described how during her internship at her current school, the staff and principal were incredibly supportive. They sought her out, asked her questions, and gave guidance throughout the internship experience. Now in the assistant principal position, the support that was present during her internship semester is no longer there. She has to seek out colleagues for answers. The other instance where she voiced wanting support was after a discipline situation that involved a drug search where she had no previous experience. Ms. Irwin was forced to conduct a search with no knowledge of the procedures. She was "Faking it to make it." She added, "As a first year assistant principal, I think there should be something there for me to make sure I am doing things right, legally, because I am there and I don't even know if I am making the right decisions." She later added "I wish that I had had some guidance and just once a week meet...but there is nothing in place." In a later conversation, our small district middle school participant, Ms. Clark discussed how in many situations she had to "fake it till you make it" because she lacked the support and knowledge to handle different situations. Both small district female participants would have liked to see more support opportunities within their first year.

After listening to each participant share, you saw how the well-developed larger districts were able to reach out to their novice assistant principals, providing socialization, resources, personnel, and situational support at both the district and campus levels. While the smaller district assistant principals had to find their own resources from colleagues, past mentors, or faking it until they made it. The larger districts had the means and personnel to utilize, plan, and serve as sources of support. For those in smaller districts, there was less means and therefore effort to help create or promote support within their districts. Given that almost all of our participants shared similar responsibilities and job situations, the support systems in place for these assistant principals should also be comparable. The larger well developed districts were in compliance with the suggestions made by the literature, while other districts were unable to provide the same types of opportunities for their new assistant principals.

The findings within the study offer several suggestions for preparation of assistant principals. After analyzing the data for themes, several conclusions can be made. A discussion of implications based on this research follows in Chapter V. This chapter will also provide ideas for further research and recommendations

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

There were several reasons for conducting this study. One purpose in choosing my research topic was to obtain a fresh look into the assistant principal position. Upon completion of this paper, my master's degree will be in educational leadership and I wanted to see how other graduate students felt about their preparation for the administration position. I wanted to see how the preparation methods played out on a daily basis. My other reason for conducting the study was of pure interest in the assistant principal position. As I continue to prepare myself for the role of an administrator, I wanted to ensure I am knowledgeable in the position I want to pursue.

The purpose of the study was to determine how school districts and universities can better prepare and support first year assistant principals. My study consisted of five research questions: (1) How do assistant principals describe their roles and responsibilities, (2) How do assistant principals describe the benefits of their preparation programs, (3) In what ways did their university prepare students for the assistant principal position, (4) How do assistant principals describe the benefits of the support they received within their districts, (5) How might universities and school districts collaborate and work together for the preparation and support of first year assistant principals?

This qualitative study was designed to explore these research questions through the experiences and perceptions of seven first year assistant principals. Data collection was based on focus group discussions and online reflective journaling. Participants shared their responsibilities, challenges, support systems, aspirations, and frustrations they had within the first eight months as assistant principals. Their reflective journals and dialogue from focus group discussions were transcribed, then categorized, analyzed, and produced within this paper. With the completion of the data collection and analysis, I was able to identify several conclusions as well as limitations and recommendations for future research.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitations of this study focused upon the different data collection methods. The participants were all recruited from State University. Because all participants attended the same graduate program, their reflections and perspectives are based upon their experiences at State University. The data provided by participants was not representative of all preparation programs or even a few; just one.

Because one data collection technique was a focus group, all participants were able to see and hear each other. Having a large group discussion while being asked to share personal, confidential information with others, can easily sway what details or experiences participants will share within the group. If participants had responded separately, they may have responded differently to research questions.

The relationship between participants and researchers also may have influenced participant responses. The study did not share a traditional researcher and participant

relationship. In many cases, I had projects, classes, discussions, and dinner with some of the participants while enrolled in similar graduate courses. We were peers at State University. Because our relationship was more relaxed, this may have influenced what participants chose to share in focus group discussions and their online reflective journals.

During focus group discussions, there was a scribe present who also may have influenced participant responses. The scribe was a current professor at State University and for some participants a previous professor during their course work at State University. Having a faculty member present while discussing areas for improvement in graduate preparation programs could easily affect how participants respond.

Implications

Recognizing that there is a large need for quality administrators and that most administrators begin there career as assistant principals, school districts and universities have the responsibility for recruiting and preparing these aspiring leaders. We know the complexity of the assistant principal position is becoming more challenging with the growing demands on schools today (Cranston, Troman, & Reugebrink, 2004; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Based upon what the literature tells us and the participants' perspectives, several conclusions can be made about the preparation of assistant principals.

University programs are a crucial factor in the preparation of assistant principals. Lately there has been an increase in research on the university preparation methods. The literature and research call for universities to revamp their programs to focus on more practical and problem-based learning styles. We know from the data that assistant

principals' days revolve around many managerial tasks such as discipline, conflict resolution, and supervision of students. In order to better prepare graduate students for these tasks, more practice based instruction is needed for university coursework. The participants, who shared their experiences and suggestions for university courses, strongly recommended the use of more learning opportunities that focus upon the daily tasks that occupy their time. With both the literature and participants suggesting the need for more focus on practice rather than theory, universities need to reexamine their courses to ensure that graduate students receive learning opportunities to experience, role play, and discuss day-to-day tasks and situations that can arise within the assistant principal role.

Universities also need to consider the demographics of surrounding districts in their preparation efforts. District size plays an important role in the frequency and multitude of tasks assistant principals can have. Experiences and responsibilities within the position can differ based upon the school and district demographics. The first year experiences of Ms. Clark and Mr. Smith, middle school assistant principals in small rural districts, vary greatly from those assistant principals like Ms. Taylor and Mr. Hughes in larger suburban districts. Universities should keep this in mind for preparing assistant principals. Instruction should highlight the roles and responsibilities for different district demographics to ensure well-rounded preparation.

In addition to adding more practical topics, both the literature and participants called for a mix of faculty with current administrators. The participants found much of their need for practical situations and experiences came from the faculty members who

were current administrators. Participants found having faculty who also served as community principals added value and meaning in the courses where these professors taught. Having a mixture of faculty would allow universities to have a knowledge base of current practitioners and researchers, which in turn would strengthen curriculum goals and alignment.

Universities should also consider what the literature and participants suggest in supporting students. The literature calls for a variety of methods for providing socialization for graduate students and then once obtaining assistant principal positions. My participants were not part of any formal mentor or cohort group opportunities for the preparation into the assistant principal position. However, from some of their responses, the need for support is crucial. Designing a university preparation program where groups of students attend the same classes, share the same professors and experiences, would establish many opportunities for reflection, sharing, and growth. Cohorts would establish university support relationships that could easily transition into support upon obtaining an assistant principal position. The relationships established at the college level could serve as a source for networking, guidance for handling day to day situations, discussion, and reflection opportunities once in the field.

The university programs are not alone in preparing assistant principals. In fact, Normore (2005) found that "professional development is shifting from university campuses to district offices…personnel in the school districts are playing an increasingly important role in planning and implementing professional development for teachers and administrators" (p.118). School districts are becoming an important part of the

preparation puzzle. Developing effective leaders requires concentrated efforts by universities as well as by districts (Bradshaw, Buckner, & Hopkins, 1997; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). While a majority of the research focused upon what universities should do to prepare assistant principals, I also wanted to see what participants said about the training and support they received from their school districts.

School districts played a large factor in many of the participants' responses in this study. With six districts represented, I saw gaps in how different novice assistant principals were being trained and supported. For those smaller district assistant principals without formal district training and support, they portrayed the "fake it till you make it" motto while those in larger districts had the resources, support, district personnel, and training. The large district participants were more confident in their positions. My participants in the smaller districts were found to be more frustrated. Their school districts' efforts to prepare and support had fallen short of what they had originally anticipated.

One area in which school districts should focus on improving is that of support. All participants stated wanting it or those who had it discussed how helpful and beneficial the support was transitioning into the position. By providing novice assistant principals with a mentor, group of peers, administrative staff, or providing networking opportunities, assistant principals will develop supportive relationships. For those in the larger well- developed districts, who had formal support systems, they shared feelings of being less stressed about their decision making and being more confident. They also were able to seek others' opinions as well as vent. The participants without the strong support

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systems carried much of their load themselves and their feelings of frustration were evident. As a result, they began to question their position. Hearing their responses enabled me to easily see how other assistant principals could become frustrated and question their role and why they chose to be in it. Providing different types of support would be an easy step for school districts to ensure assistant principals become more comfortable in their role rather than become frustrated and burned out.

By having district and university personnel collaborate, they work towards a common understanding of essential leadership skills and a process for developing them.

Collaboration is an area for both school districts and universities to improve upon. Throughout the literature, researchers suggest collaboration of key players in educational preparation (Bradshaw, Buckner, & Hopkins, 1997; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Young & Peterson, 2002). Research by Bradshaw, Buckner, and Hopkins (1997) found that if universities and school districts work together "leadership development programs will be stronger and better coordinated, and candidates entering administrative positions will be more likely to be able to apply theory to practice and demonstrate required skills on the job" (p. 2). The call for collaboration seems simple enough; however, finding the time and personnel to revamp training and support is difficult. One way in which school districts and universities can work together is through the dynamics of university faculty. Having a mixture of practitioners and scholars can balance the types of courses and instruction methods within the curriculum. Graduate students could then receive the day-to-day managerial aspects of school administration that the literature and participants recommend from practitioners. And then build upon

that foundation with the leadership and theoretical knowledge from other faculty members.

Support systems are another area in which both universities and school districts need to collaborate. Both parties need to ensure the socialization and support of their assistant principals. By providing opportunities such as cohort groups, mentor relationships, or periodic staff development training, where assistant principals can meet and network, assistant principals will feel better prepared and supported in their role.

Recommendations for Further Research

Given that the assistant principal position is an emerging research topic and that the position will become more complex and challenging, further research in the areas of leadership preparation and practices should be continued (Cranston, Troman, & Reugebrink, 2004; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Based upon the data analysis, findings, and conclusions of this study, it would be appropriate to recommend further studies in the areas of university and district preparation strategies and collaboration in regards to the assistant principalship.

In future research, I would recommend the consultation of university and school district personnel for their perspectives on leadership preparation and strategies. This study focused upon the assistant principals without the input of school district or university personnel. Future research should investigate the perspectives of novice assistant principals, their graduate faculty, and their school districts. In addition, studies on current collaboration efforts between school districts and universities would be beneficial for research.

Because my participants all attended the same graduate program, I would also suggest a study with participants who represent several different preparation programs. By having participants from several graduate programs, there will be more of a variety of experiences and perspectives shared. The data would be representative of more than one graduate program.

I would also suggest following up with students on their practicum or internship experiences completed in their graduate school coursework. The internship is one of the "real-life" instruction methods that some universities provide. My study did not touch on the topic of internships as much, but there is a definite need for it in the research. The internship experience is one of the major collaborative efforts made between universities and school districts. University faculty working with school districts in order to place graduate students with current administrators calls for partnership. This collaboration could be the starting point for better communication between two key players in leadership preparation. By continuing research on these topics, both researchers and practitioners can better facilitate quality educational opportunities for our future school leaders.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Review

TWU
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
DENTON DALLAS HOUSTON
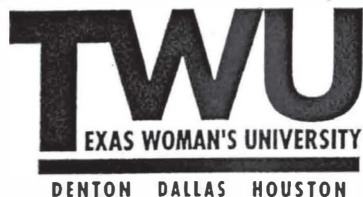
Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378   Fax 940-898-3416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

September 12, 2006

Ms. Emily Gray
c/o Dr. Rhonda McClellan – SH 116
Teacher Education

Dear Ms. Gray:

Re: *Principal Preparation Practices: Perspectives on Educational Leadership
         Programs and Their Efforts for Retention of New School Leaders*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board
(IRB) and was determined to be exempt from further review.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR
to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB
approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval
date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. The signed consent forms
must be filed with the Institutional Review Board at the completion of the study.

Another review by the IRB is required if your project changes in any way, and the IRB
must be notified immediately regarding any adverse events. If you have any questions,
feel free to call the TWU Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Dr. David Nichols, Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc. Dr. Nan Restine, Department of Teacher Education
     Dr. Rhonda McClellan, Department of Teacher Education
     Graduate School

Simply the **BEST**

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Texas Woman's University
Consent to Participate in Research

Title: Faking It To Make It: Assistant Principals' Perspectives on Educational Leadership Preparation

Researchers: Emily Gray   214-367-9297
               Rhonda McClellan, Ed.D.   940-898-2244

Explanation and Purpose of the Research
The purpose of this study is to better understand the roles and responsibilities of beginning assistant principals and to anticipate how schools and educational programs might foster development to ensure retention of new school leaders. The study will examine participants' experiences and preparation practices for their role as an educational leader.

Research Procedures

The participants will meet in a focus group setting on three occasions from September 2006 to March 2007. The focus group meetings will be one and a half hours in length. Audiotaping will be used in the focus group meetings. The purpose of audiotaping is to provide a transcription of the information for accurate reporting within the study. Participants will also respond to questions through email on four occasions throughout September 2006 to March 2007. Each reflection email will require thirty minutes in length. Emails will be sent to each participant confidentially; no other participant will see or have access to other participants email address or reflection answers. All email correspondence related to this study will be deleted from the email account by May 2007. The maximum time commitment for the participants would be six and a half hours total. The outline of the study's events is listed below.

Focus Group Meeting	**Reflection Email**
September	October
December	November
March	January
	February

Potential Risks

A potential risk to you as a result of your participation in this research study is the release of confidential information. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. Participants will meet other participants within the focus group meetings however, any information shared from focus group meetings, will be coded for confidentiality purposes. Code names will be used for transcription of audiotapes. All email addresses and information within these emails will be accessible to only the researchers in this study. All consent forms, email reflections, audiotapes, and transcriptions will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Dr. McClellan's office. Results from this study will provide researchers with information that may lead to the possibility of presentation or publication.

The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants will be looking at the mentoring process through discussion and reflection among participants. The experiences and ideas shared will provide researchers and participants with ideas on how to foster new Assistant Principals for retention and success in their positions.

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. The original consent form will be kept in a locked drawer. If you have any questions regarding the research study please contact the researchers; their phone numbers are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via email-at IRB@twu.edu.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

APPENDIX C

Demographics Form

Participant Demographics

Please circle or respond to the following requests for information. We will use this information for coding and confidentiality purposes.

1. **Gender:**
   a. Male
   b. Female

2. **Number of years in Education:**
   1-5 years   6-11   12-16

3. **Number of years and/or months in Assistant Principal position:**
   Years:
   Months:

4. **School Type:**
   Elementary School
   Middle School
   High School

5a. **Were you employed as a teacher in your current school district when hired as an Assistant Principal?**

5b. **If so, how long had you worked within the district?**

APPENDIX D

September Focus Group Script

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September 19, 2006
First Focus Group Meeting

Consent Form/Demographics sheet- Collect completed forms or have participants complete while eating.

Opening Statement:
Welcome! Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion of leadership in education. My name is Emily Gray and with me is Rhonda McClellan from State University. We have invited you here because you are all new to your Assistant Principal positions and we want to gain a better understanding of your responsibilities and experiences within your first year in the position. We are looking forward to hearing your opinions and experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. Seven people are not going to share the same experiences or opinions so we expect different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. We are tape recording this session so we do not miss any of your comments. No names will be included in any report. Your comments are confidential. We are interested in both the positive and negative comments. If at any time, you would like me to turn off the tape recorder, I will do so. There are name tents here in front of us to help the researchers remember names. If you want to follow up on something, feel free to do so. If you want to agree or disagree, please feel free to do so. The purpose of a focus group is to have dialogue between the researcher and participants, as well as among the participants. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask the questions, to listen, and to make sure everyone has a chance to say something. We're interested in hearing from each of you. So if you are talking a lot I may ask you to give others a chance. If you aren't saying much, I may call on you. We want to make sure we hear from each of you.

As research facilitators, we have to follow a protocol for the entire focus group meeting. Throughout the meeting we will stick strictly to a text, so you will not hear much from us. Dr. McClellan will be our scribe and I will be asking a few questions and then you will converse among yourselves.

Feel free to get up and get more refreshments if you would like. Let's go on ahead and begin. We will start with brief introductions going around the room one at a time.

Opening Question:
Each of you please, tell me who you are, where your district is, and one of your interests outside of school.

Key Question: What are your responsibilities as an assistant principal?

Key Question: Describe a fulfilling day at work.

Key Question: Describe a "support-system" for administrators at your school or in your district.

Ending Question: Moderator gives a two-to-three minute summary of what has been shared and then asks, "How well does that capture what was said here?"

Closing Statements:
Thank you again for your participation today. Your comments and opinions were very beneficial to our research and we appreciate you taking the time from your busy schedules to meet with us. We will not meet again in a focus group again until January However, you will receive a reflection email early in October and November. The emails will contain one reflective question and a deadline for responses. If at any point, you have questions for Dr. McClellan or I please call or email us. Thank you again for your participation.

APPENDIX E

January Focus Group Script

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Opening Statement:

      Welcome back! Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion of leadership in education. My name is Emily Gray and with me is Rhonda McClellan from State University. We have invited you here because you are all new to your Assistant Principal positions and we want to gain a better understanding of your responsibilities and experiences within your first year in the position. We are looking forward to hearing your opinions and experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. Seven people are not going to share the same experiences or opinions so we expect different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

      We are tape recording this session so we do not miss any of your comments. No names will be included in any report. Your comments are confidential. We are interested in both the positive and negative comments. If at any time, you would like me to turn off the tape recorder, I will do so. There are name tents here in front of us to help the researchers remember names. If you want to follow up on something, feel free to do so. If you want to agree or disagree, please feel free to do so. The purpose of a focus group is to have dialogue between the researcher and participants, as well as among the participants. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask the questions, to listen, and to make sure everyone has a chance to say something. We're interested in hearing from each of you. So if you are talking a lot I may ask you to give others a chance. If you aren't saying much, I may call on you. We want to make sure we hear from each of you.

As research facilitators, we have to follow a protocol for the entire focus group meeting. Throughout the meeting we will stick strictly to a text, so you will not hear much from us. Dr. McClellan will be our scribe and I will be asking a few questions and then you will converse among yourselves.

Feel free to get up and get more refreshments if you would like. Let's go on ahead and begin. We will start with brief introductions going around the room one at a time.

Opening Question: Please introduce yourself and describe your attraction for the AP position.

Key Question: Now having worked for over a semester, has your attraction to the position changed, if so, how?

Key Question: Describe your original expectations for your role as assistant principal? **and** How have those expectations been fulfilled or not?

Key Question: How has your experience and course work in graduate school influenced your role as an AP?

Key Question: How could your educational program better foster the development of novice AP's. What changes would you make to your grad school experiences for preparation for the AP position?

Ending Question: Moderator gives a two-to-three minute summary of what has been shared and then asks, "How well does that capture what was said here?"

Closing Statements:
Thank you again for your participation today. Your comments and opinions were very beneficial to my research and I appreciate you taking the time from your busy schedules to meet. We will not meet again in a focus group again until March. However, you will receive a reflection email for January and February. The emails will contain one reflective question and a deadline for responses. If at any point, you have questions for Dr. McClellan or me, please call or email us. Thank you again for your participation.

APPENDIX F

March Focus Group Script

March 5th, 2007
Third Focus Group Meeting

Consent Form/Demographics sheet- Collect completed forms from Mike.

Opening Statement:
　　　　Welcome back! Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion of leadership in education. My name is Emily Gray and with me is Rhonda McClellan from State University. We have invited you here because you are all new to your Assistant Principal positions and we want to gain a better understanding of your responsibilities and experiences within your first year in the position. We are looking forward to hearing your opinions and experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. Seven people are not going to share the same experiences or opinions so we expect different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.
　　　　We are tape recording this session so we do not miss any of your comments. No names will be included in any report. Your comments are confidential. We are interested in both the positive and negative comments. If at any time, you would like me to turn off the tape recorder, I will do so. There are name tents here in front of us to help the researchers remember names. If you want to follow up on something, feel free to do so. If you want to agree or disagree, please feel free to do so. The purpose of a focus group is to have dialogue between the researcher and participants, as well as among the participants. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask the questions, to listen, and to make sure everyone has a chance to say something. We're interested in hearing from each of you. So if you are talking a lot I may ask you to give others a chance. If you aren't saying much, I may call on you. We want to make sure we hear from each of you.

As research facilitators, we have to follow a protocol for the entire focus group meeting. Throughout the meeting we will stick strictly to a text, so you will not hear much from us. Dr. McClellan will be our scribe and I will be asking a few questions and then you will converse among yourselves.

Feel free to get up and get more refreshments if you would like. Let's go on ahead and begin. We will start with brief introductions going around the room one at a time.

Key Question: Describe an experience where you had to implement change within your school and how you went about making the change.

    Prompt: How did you recognize the need for change?
    Prompt: What resources did you utilize?
    Prompt: What influenced how you went about making this change?
    Hollis:

Key Question: Describe a difficult decision and how you went about handling the situation.

    Prompt: How did you perceive the situation?
    Prompt: What helped you analyze the situation?
    Prompt: What influenced how you addressed the situation?

Key Question: Describe how your school district and/or university prep programs influenced your decision making processes as an AP?

Key Question: Describe your ideal support system for a new AP.

Key Question: With almost a school year in the Assistant Principal role, what would you recommend your preparation programs change/maintain/ or tweak to better prepare novice AP's?

Ending Question: Moderator gives a two-to-three minute summary of what has been shared and then asks, "How well does that capture what was said here?"

Closing Statements:
Thank you again for your participation today. Your comments and opinions were very beneficial to my research and I appreciate you taking the time from your busy schedules to meet. This concludes your participation in the study and we thank you for all your thoughts and perspective. The final draft of the research paper will be finished this summer. If you would like a copy, please let me know and I would be happy to send you one. Thank you again for your participation.

APPENDIX G

Graduate School Approval

The Graduate School
P.O. Box 425649, Denton, TX 76204-5649
940-898-3415   Fax 940-898-3412

0776244

May 16, 2007

Ms. Emily Gray
4317 Sendero Trail
Plano TX 75024

Dear Ms. Gray:

I have received and approved the prospectus entitled **"Faking It to Make It: Assistant Principals' Perspectives on Educational Leadership Preparation"** for your Thesis research project.

Best wishes to you in the research and writing of your project.

Sincerely yours,

Jennifer L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

ekd

cc: Dr. Rhonda McClellan, Department of Teacher Education
     Dr. L. Nan Restine, Chair, Department of Teacher Education

APPENDIX H

Participant Demographics Table

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Years in Education	In-district Hire	Years in District	Total Campus Assistant Principals
Mr. Hughes	6-11	Yes	5	3
Mr. Smith	6-11	No	--	1
Ms. Irwin	1-5	Yes	4	4
Mr. Redding	1-5	Yes	5	2
Mr. Matthews	6-11	Yes	4	3
Ms. Taylor	12-16	Yes	15	1
Ms. Clark	6-11	No	--	1

APPENDIX I

District Demographics Table

Table 2

District Demographics

Participant Name	District Name/ Setting	Campus Enrollment	District Enrollment
Mr. Hughes	Ford ISD-suburban Middle School	661	20,081
Mr. Smith	Adams ISD-rural Middle School	423	1,505
Ms. Irwin	Eisenhower ISD-rural High School	1,835	12,573
Mr. Redding	Lincoln ISD-urban High School	990	49, 186
Mr. Matthews	Lincoln ISD-suburban Middle School	1,041	49, 186
Ms. Taylor	Pierce ISD-suburban Elementary School	751	52,816
Ms. Clark	Truman ISD-rural Middle School	369	2,406