Advancements for Principals

Pauline M. Sampson and Kerry L. Roberts

Considering an Overhaul to the New Principal Preparation Program

Vance Vaughn and Yanira Oliveras-Ortiz

Pursuing the Principalship: Factors in Assistant Principals’ Decisions

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Professional Development for Educational Leaders in the Era of Performance Evaluation Reform

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Principal Perceptions of Walkthrough Effectiveness

Teresa Martin Starrett

Family Involvement Strategies of Asian Students with High Achievement in Middle School Mathematics: A Phenomenological Narrative Study

Kenneth N. Anisoiobi

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Advancements for Principals

This edition has some clear presentations for the important principal role and how universities impact the new principals. Additionally, there is a paper on the assistant principals and their movement to the principal position. Our TCPEA Outstanding Graduate Research Exchange paper showcases middle school mathematics achievement for Asian students and parent involvement.

Vance Vaughn and Yanica Oliveras-Ortiz provide suggestions for university faculty and administration preparing principals in their article, *Considering an Overhaul to the New Principal Preparation Program*. They recommended the importance of understanding accountability and reconstitution in the new age of accountability. In their case study research they examined three school districts over a five year span. From this research, they determined that universities need to include training on walkthroughs and appraisal systems, the correct use of data, and an understanding of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Amy Ellis and Casey Graham Brown examined the factors related to the assistant principals’ movement to the principal position in their article, *Pursuing the Principalship: Factors in Assistant Principals’ Decisions*. Their survey research was completed by 323 assistant principals. The findings showed that one of the inhibiting factors for assistant principals’ move to the principal position was the ways the job would impact them personally. A motivating factor for the move was the challenge of a principal position. There were differences in the responses by gender, ethnicity, and grade level of the principal position.

Kelly Hodgson Summers, Todd D. Reeves, David A. Walker, and J. Schwartz offer a framework of professional development on ethical and effective performance evaluations in their article, *Professional Development Considerations*. The major components in their framework are policy and state laws, statistics, assessment types and purposes, and valued added models. Although their components are based on the state of Illinois, the components are also applicable to Texas as new formative assessments for teachers and principals are being considering in Texas.

Teresa Martin Starrett conducted research with school leaders and the value of walkthroughs in her research, *Principal Perceptions of Walkthrough Effectiveness*. She found that school leaders who agreed on the importance of feedback for teachers as well as the importance of post observations and reflections also believed in the importance of social justice, CEC professional standards, and special evaluation law knowledge by principals. A major constraint of walkthroughs is the time. However, a major benefit is improvement of instruction and thus increased student achievement.
The TCPEA Outstanding Graduate Research Exchange paper, *Family Involvement Strategies of Asian Students with High Achievement in Middle School Mathematics: A Phenomenological Narrative Study*, was written by Kenneth N. Anisoiobi and is included in this issue. His research examined middle school Asian students with mathematics achievement above 80% proficiency and their parent involvement as determined by PTA. His findings showed that the parents of high achieving students used more than one language in the home. Additionally, the parents used a warm interaction style with their children that emphasized consistency and positive adult role models with high structure and discipline in the home.

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Associate Editor
Levine (2005) argued that university principal preparation programs for educational leaders are failing to provide a suitable curriculum to prepare aspiring principals to demonstrate the skills and competencies necessary to meet the challenges inherent in the increasingly complex demands of their school leadership roles. Teitel (2006) suggested that colleges and universities offer curricula that are neither coherent nor relevant. According to Candidates, Doctoral Cohort; Coleman, J. Craig; and Alford, Betty J. (2007), it is “a grave disservice [that] is done to university program graduates who enter leadership positions woefully unprepared for the awaiting firestorm” (p. 39).

Colleges and universities have suffered and endured a plethora of criticisms over not properly preparing principals to lead the schools of the 21st century. This powerful statement prompts us to ask what we think are two very important questions. The first question is, what does one mean by “properly preparing?” The second question is, what skills must a principal showcase to lead the schools of the 21st century? This case study research does not directly answer these two questions; nevertheless, the questions are at the heart of this research. This study does, however, illuminate the voices of principals and teachers currently practicing on campuses that fell into “Improvement Required” under the Texas accountability system. The results of this study suggests that regardless of college or university training, principals must have knowledge of the Texas accountability system and provide the means whereby teachers are maximizing student learning and student progress towards being college ready after high school graduation. The purpose of this study is to share with college and university professors the language principals and teachers are using immediately before their campus falls into “Improvement Required.” From these dialogues and conversations, colleges and universities can decipher what training and education is vitally important to successful principal preparation.

Without a doubt, disagreement can easily come to consensus that principals must be armed with the necessary qualities and skill set deemed appropriate to lead and manage in this highly complex, complicated and demanding position. Moreover, we think we know, according to research what these qualities and skill set should look like (Edmonds, 1976; Darling-Hammonds, 2006, Sherman & Jones, 2014). The answer to the quandary, however, might rest in connecting the shifting of the roles and responsibilities of the principal by laws and statutes, and the theoretical framework that has sketched the
principal as “instructional leader.” In Edmonds (1976) seminal work, the principal is painted as an instructional leader. Ron Edmonds of Harvard put the term “Effective Schools” on the map with his speech “Some Schools Work and more Can” in 1978. He stated,

We can whenever, and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children who’s schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need, in order to do this. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.”

According to Edmonds’ “Effective Schools Checklist,” it’s not rocket science! Sherman and Jones (2014) echo Edmonds in their most recent work. They suggest colleges and universities should prepare principals to be teachers of teachers by engaging them in developmental supervision. Developmental supervision is observing teachers for quality instruction and filling in the missing instructional gaps using principles of learning.

Reyes and Wagstaff (2005), and Candidates, Doctoral Cohort; Coleman, J. Craig; and Alford, Betty J. (2007) offered the following:

Treading their way through the demands of federally mandated accountability measures such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the maze of politically polarizing issues affecting schools, school leaders will need to be both scholars and practitioners to meet the challenges of school improvement such as closing the achievement gap and raising the academic performance of all students (p. 7).

Understanding that theory is embedded in practice through scholar-practitioner leadership (Jenlink, 2002, 2005, 2006) we offer even a more pragmatic approach to the principalship.

A Practical Focus

Colleges and universities might be altering the way they prepare their future principals. Why? The new Texas accountability system for PreK-12 school campuses and districts is nothing like the old system. In the previous accountability system, schools were rated based on a set of measures that looked at different ethnic groups’ passing rates with no consideration to students academic growth, the schools’ efforts to close the achievement gap, and advanced academic performance. In the new system, the school accountability standards have changed; the system is a complex system based on four indexes that measure student performance in addition to student growth, college readiness, graduation rates, as well as the schools’ efforts to close the achievement gap. In addition to a new accountability system, the new teacher and principal appraisal systems are changing, and finally the internships and practicums are taking on a new look. Considering all the changes being implemented as a result of the demands of the federal government and state initiatives, principals might need a different skill set from the one colleges and universities are currently providing. Principal preparation programs might need to
readjust their course sequence of law, finance, and instructional leadership courses; aspiring principals ought to have the skills needed to successfully manage schools while being instructional leaders under the new accountability system and new teacher and principal evaluation systems. Elaboration on all of these changes added together would be too extensive for this manuscript; therefore, we have chosen to isolate one change in particular, the new Texas accountability system, and discuss the necessary ingredients principal preparation programs might consider including in their training of principals.

The New Texas Accountability System

“School accountability – the process of evaluating school performance on the basis of student performance measures – is increasing around the world” (Figlio & Loeb, 2011, p. 384). In the United States, it has become prevalent that “whatever could not be measured did not count” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 21), particularly since the authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Texas politicians and educators are no strangers to accountability based on student performance. Some claim that the NCLB Act was modeled after the Texas accountability system (TEA, 2015). While the state implemented its first testing program in the early 1980s, it was in the late 1980s when the 71st Texas Legislature established the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) (TEA, 2013). The state’s accountability system slightly changed throughout the years with the most noticeable, radical changes occurring in the 2012-2013 school year with the implementation of the new accountability system. The new Texas accountability system is uniquely designed, somewhat complicated and sometimes difficult for principals, campus leaders and teachers to decipher. The intent propping and supporting the new accountability system is the notion that “no child will be left behind.” To this end, every child on the school campus who takes a State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and/or End of Course (EOC) exam will help determine the different ratings for each campus, but unlike previous systems, passing the state assessment is not the only and main indicator of a school’s performance. Students’ academic performance is part of the index-based accountability system and so are the students’ growth in reading and mathematics, the students’ ability to perform at advanced levels, the schools’ efforts to close the achievement gap with a focus on economically disadvantaged students and different ethnic groups as well as high school graduation and the type of high school diplomas students are earning. Thus, aspiring school administrators, current administrators and teachers must grasp the intent of the new system, and align their instruction and professional development in such a way that they are maximizing student academic achievement at the correct level of rigor, and are addressing individual student progress and growth.

The focus in the new accountability system has changed drastically. Principals and teachers are having to change their vocabulary when discussing the new system, as well as alter their thinking about particular groups of students and overall passing rates. The focus now is on all students individually in all areas of the core curriculum, progressing academically and making preparation to be college ready after graduation. According to
Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Seizer, and Wood (2004) “public schools need a very different tool kit for the problems we face” (p. 65).

**Accountability and Reconstitution**

A significant change in the accountability system is the consequences faced by principals of schools who fail to meet the accountability system’s targets. Although school reconstitution was a part of the old accountability system, school principals had a longer period of time to turn their schools around when their schools failed to meet the state’s accountability standards. In the new accountability system, there is a sense of urgency that was not part of the previous systems. Schools who fail to meet the standards could face reconstitution after two years of substandard performance; a component of the accountability system that school administrators must fully understand to successfully avoid.

Of deeper importance is the assurance that principals and teachers who are in “improvement required” schools for two consecutive years will face severe sanctions. In 2014 accountability system, a school that failed to meet at least one of the set targets of the four accountability indexes was rated as an “improved required” school. While the 2015 accountability system is still under development, one thing is for certain, the targets, standards, and the details within each index of the accountability change will change. Given the changes and the consequences linked to the accountability system, it is the principal’s responsibility to stay informed to avoid becoming an “improvement required” school. Thus, accountability takes on an even greater role. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary (n.d.) defines accountability in ethics and governance as answerability, blameworthiness, liability, and the expectation of account giving. In other words, someone has to be held responsible for “that thing” or “that mistake” or, in education of students, “the failures.” The “blame-game” is not a new phenomenon. Unfortunately, under this new accountability system the campus principal is the first in line to be held accountable for students’ poor academic performance. Under the new accountability system principals whose campuses falls into improvement required for two consecutive years shall be removed from the campus in that capacity (TEA, 2008).

In addition, campuses that fall into improvement required for two consecutive years must face reconstitution. Reconstitution occurs when the principal, and all instructional staff is removed from the campus while the campus reconstructs the professional staff, the curriculum design, the processes and structures and the academic focus (TEA, 2008).

Given the severe consequences school principals face if the school falls into improvement required, current and aspiring school administrators must have a deeper understanding of the new accountability system and be skilled in the use of the data to guide their decisions. School principals must understand not only the structure of the accountability system but also how to utilize data to continuously monitor student performance and growth. The new accountability system provides school leaders and teachers with data
and a growth measure system that can be utilized to set goals for the individual students, a practice that research has shown can positively impact student commitment, motivation and learning (Schunk, 2009; Stronge & Grant, 2013). The accountability system is no longer about passing or failing the state tests but rather about holding teachers and administrators accountable for students’ growth, which is a significant shift from the previous system. School principals must recognize the implications of the new accountability system and the impact it has on their roles as principals, their schools, and ultimately in the instructional practices being implemented in their classrooms. Hence, it is the responsibility of principal preparation programs to ensure aspiring principals have an understanding of the new accountability system to be better prepare them to tackle the challenges they might face as they enter school administration.

**Methods**

Marshall and Rossman (1999) claimed over 15 years ago that case study research is significant because case studies illuminate in detail justification for those decisions normally based on conceptual frameworks. Since principal preparation draws from such a strong conceptual foundation, a case study approach was necessary. Johnson and Christensen (2012) later supported that case study research addresses the research questions and/or the real issues.

This case study involved interaction in three school districts over a five-year period. While acting as participant observer one of the researchers worked along side the principals and the teaching staff to bring the schools out of improvement required and into an acceptable rating under the state accountability system. Direct observation was also used as a data collection tool. In order to triangulate the data, the researcher conducted interviews in focused groups, and also with individual principals and teachers. This case study was pertinent since this research addressed one descriptive question. The research question was, what are principals and teachers saying and doing on campuses that make them fall into improvement required? A phenomenon within its real-world context, this case study method allowed the researchers to collect data in a natural setting.

**Results**

The research question was, what are principals and teachers saying and doing on campuses that make them fall into improvement required? Data for this question were captured during teacher and principal interviews, and through direct conversations. On all three campuses the issues, concerns and conversations were the same. The commonalities were “not being aware of” the new accountability system, “not understanding my role” as a teacher, and “if I had know about individual student progress” my instructional approach would not have been the same. On all campuses the Professional Development Appraisal System (PDAS) was the only instrument used to determine if teachers were teaching the curriculum.
When asked what data were collected from instruction to assure student gains, one teacher stated, “We did not concentrate on individual student progress because we were still looking at overall benchmark scores. I know I was.” Another stated, “no one stressed indexes to us as far as I know, so it [individual gains] wasn’t a major concern to me.” Two teachers boldly stated accountability was not a concern for the campus because the campus had never experienced academic failure before, and the fact that they were even in improvement required was a “shock” to many. One teacher stated, “We can not believe this is happening, and I am embarrassed about the whole thing.” Another teacher chimed, “This is unbelievable, it’s like we are teaching at a failing school, and had we known what would have gotten us here, I’m sure we would have worked on it. We are all surprised.”

One principal stated, “We just got caught this year because some of our teachers had a bad year, and our students did not work hard enough. I am sure it will straighten out this next year.” The same principal shared, “I did not observe teachers other than their normal PDAS observation because these teachers are professionals and they usually do a good job with their students.” Still a different principal stated,

My plate is full every day with meetings, discipline, putting out fires and managing the daily operations that it is almost impossible for me to handle instruction. Besides, we hire teachers to teach and that’s what we expect them to do.

These types of statements were common and repeated throughout the data, year after year, from teachers and principals on all three campuses. From these statements we share the following implications and offer the following recommendations for principal preparation programs.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications and recommendations are many and are of utmost importance. The urgency is necessary simply because principals are being moved from their respective campuses. Three recommendations include: 1) providing our graduate students, the future school administrators of Texas, with current knowledge of the state accountability system, 2) ensuring that aspiring principals leave educational leadership programs with the knowledge and skill set deemed appropriate for practical, successful “nuts and bolts” leadership, training promising principals to collect, analyze and use data to drive instructional decisions, and 3) equipping potential principals with the skills to understand, feel comfortable with and direct curriculum, instruction and assessment on their campuses, thereby improving student achievement collectively and individually.

Recommendation No. 1. Provide educational leadership students with current knowledge of the state accountability system. From the data, it is clear that neither principals nor teachers have a commanding hold and understanding of the accountability
system. The preparation programs ought to ensure that future school administrators enter school administration with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully tackle the challenges the accountability system presents. Perhaps principal preparation programs could include a section on the state’s accountability system with it’s content. This inclusion ensures graduates would have extensive exposure to the relevance and necessity of understanding how the state accountability system works. The implication for not preparing principals to non-negotiate the importance of the accountability system is to allow the apathy to remain on the campuses.

**Recommendation No. 2.** Ensure that aspiring principals leave educational leadership programs with the knowledge and skill set deemed appropriate for practical, successful “nuts and bolts” leadership. We are not suggesting educational leadership programs change or reevaluate their current curricula. What we are stressing is to include preparation and opportunities for our graduate students to work on collecting quantitative and qualitative data from classroom instruction, and then use data analysis to inform and make decisions about how best to improve academic learning and growth for students collectively and individually. Principals must know how to engage in walk-throughs, conduct full teacher observations, and provide professional development for teachers who might need growth in instructional techniques. Future principals, who might be taking over schools that have been reconstituted, must be proficient in the use of data and understand the indexes and what is required to successfully meet the individual index targets. Given the short timeline provided by the new accountability system in which reconstitution is required, principals no longer have two or three years to make changes and positively impact their students’ performance. Principals must go into their first year as leaders equipped to make changes and effectively lead their schools. One implication of not stressing the importance of strong instructional leadership using data-driven decision-making is that principals might continue to allow managerial responsibilities to dictate their working habits.

**Recommendation No. 3.** Equip potential principals with the skills to understand, feel comfortable with and direct curriculum, instruction and assessment on their campuses, thereby improving student achievement collectively and individually. Principals must understand that they can and must be strong curriculum, instruction and assessment leaders on their campuses. Although the day-to-day managerial duties are absolutely important, as principals’ careers have been decided by these duties, academics and student achievement have become increasingly important to the state. Therefore, preparation programs must stress curriculum, instruction and assessment as part of their strength in design.

**Conclusion**

The state’s demands on the campus principal are too serious to ignore, especially for principal preparation programs. All universities are particular about their programs;
therefore, the question becomes, when should principal preparation programs make their changes? We believe the answer is now.

An initial theoretical perspective about school principals might claim that successful principals are those who perform as “instructional leaders.” Many educational leadership programs have adopted scholar-practitioner programs designed to increase relevancy to school administration as well as cohere with the competencies and realities embedded in the day-to-day campus operations. Perhaps educational leadership preparation programs might need to concentrate on a new design in their program. A design that concentrates heavily on preparing a principal to be fully armed, fit and totally capable of holding off the reconstitution plaque that is hovering over all campuses and districts. Vaughn (2014) asked the following question: What tools are we offering in our educational leadership programs that could help our future leaders counteract the NCLB dilemma? Having first hand experience and training in the Texas Accountability and Intervention System (TAIS) process, the Professional Service Provider (PSP) establishment and educational leadership we are offering an educational leadership program that prepares principals to be curriculum, instruction and assessment leaders of teachers who use best practices and data-driven instructional decisions with individual students.

Understanding the intricacies and nuances of the new accountability system is a vital part of ensuring requirements are being met at each of the levels of evaluation. If practicing principals and teachers do not understand how this new accountability system works, and the impact it has on the principal and possibly the teachers’ current position and careers, they could be in for a huge shock when they are told their campus has fallen into Improvement Required.

References


School administrators who are hired to lead and guide schools and districts must possess a number of characteristics that allow them to become successful leaders. The presence or absence of a strong educational leader can make all the difference in school climate and student achievement (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). Educational leaders need to be cognizant of what constitutes an effective leader and which characteristics have the most effective impact on student achievement. Alford et al. (2011) stated, "while principals are engaged in the managerial tasks of the school, securing the building for safety, ensuring bus routes, student schedules, and the day-to-day management tasks, the instructional needs of the faculty and students compete for attention" (p. 29).

Alford et al. (2011) posited that principals reported spending more time on student instructional issues and management than with leadership activities. An effective administrator has the greatest ability to make change and improvements on a campus. Educational leadership must be about coping with change due to the changing environments around us (Gorton, Alston, & Snowden, 2007).

**Statement of the Problem**

Many school districts face difficulties filling principal positions, but the number of individuals holding administrative licenses or endorsements exceeds the number of vacant positions each year. Current assistant principals are sometimes hesitant to apply for principalships. Researchers have found factors such as family issues, lack of community support, and fatigue as reasons the principalship is viewed by some as an undesirable position (Bass, 2006; Fields, 2005; MacCorkle, 2004). Principal burn out occurs for many reasons including the 50-60 hour work weeks, public scrutiny, and lack of preparations to deal with daily issues (Viadero, 2009). The pressures of high-stakes standardized testing combined with countless leadership and management tasks also have contributed to increased uncertainty in school administration (Hargreaves, 2005; Richardson, 2009).

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The role of principal is viewed as educator-in-chief, but in many districts principals are hired without examining their motivation to do the job (Mitgang, 2013). Identifying these factors can allow districts to carefully consider the role of the principal and the factors that may inhibit future qualified candidates from applying for open positions.

**Theoretical Framework**

School leadership is second only to teaching in impact on student learning (Mitgang, 2013). Bass (2006) posited that work stress and the negative impact the job has on principals’ personal lives are deterrents for those who aspire to the principalship. As accountability systems have increased in rigor, the job of principal has become more demanding (Horng, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2009). Mitchell (2009) highlighted the importance of districts training currently employed assistant principals. In order to create capable leaders, assistant principals need on-the-job training in running a school and being able to assume the role of principal in the principal’s absence (Mitchell, 2009).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) has a foundation in the self-efficacy theory of Bandura. Social Cognitive Career Theory hypothesizes that an individual’s background and characteristics “influence one’s learning experiences, and consequently, self-efficacy. Self-efficacy then would influence one's interests and outcome expectations, which eventually would influence one's career choice” (Tang, Pan, & Newmeyer, 2008, para. 4).

Kwan’s (2009) research indicated that an assistant principal's sense of efficacy is the most important factor that impacts his or her decision to aspire to the principalship. Kwan concluded that some assistant principals felt like the harmonious relationship they had built with colleagues would suffer once becoming a principal. If assistant principals find their job energizing and rewarding and believe that the stress and challenges of their work are well worth it, they may be more willing to pursue the principalship (Kwan, 2009).

**Support of Principals**

In order to provide campus leaders with the proper tools, Hill and Banta (2008) suggested that district leaders provide adequate support for future principals by hiring qualified teachers, opportunities for mentor programs, and protections from political pressures. By growing assistant principals in the area of leadership, the assistant principals can gain the knowledge and skills that it will require to move into the principalship when the opportunity arises. Individuals who are identified as self-starters or leaders-in-training need to be encouraged to continue their pursuit of the principalship (Whitaker & Vogel, 2005). In order to grow as leaders, administrators need to look to other leaders they admire and strive to emulate the positive leadership characteristics that those individuals possess (Pellicer, 2008).

In an effort to provide assistant principals with additional knowledge outside of their limited roles, Madden (2008) recommended allowing them to pursue training in the
human resources side of administration. Historically, the assistant principal’s job description has entailed a long list of managerial type responsibilities and very little else. MacCorkle (2004) stated that the assistant principal’s role does not lend itself well to training for the principalship. He identified areas where assistant principals felt they were not given proper training; the areas included professional development and leadership. The principal is the instructional leader of the campus and therefore the role of creating an environment conducive to instructional collaboration between staff members is the principal’s obligation (Seifert & Vornberg, 2002). Assistant principals must know how to create such an environment and be given the opportunity to attempt such collaboration between administrators and faculty members. Leone et al. (2009) stated that principals of the future should be a positive constant and a navigator for the direction of the building.

**Principal Candidate Shortage**

The principalship has evolved into a position with an unlimited amount of roles and responsibilities, making the attraction of the principalship diminish. Future leaders see it as a job that simply deals with managing an agenda (Fink & Brayman, 2004). Alford, Ballenger, Perreault, and Zellner (2011) reported that principals face stress that causes them to weigh the benefits and the limitations of their career choice.

MacCorkle (2004) proposed finding the key factors to attracting and retaining qualified and effective leaders. He urged educators to address the increasing deficit of qualified principal candidates in order to identify the conditions that attracted people to the principalship. With the accountability system leading educational reform and curriculum and testing-based classroom instruction, the role of the principal becomes even more demanding and rigorous (Horng, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2009).

**Assistant Principals’ Perceptions of the Principalship**

As current assistant principals watch building principals’ role and duties evolve into greater and more detailed responsibilities, districts are finding it difficult to locate a good pool of applicants. Aspiring principals tend to be skeptical about the roles and responsibilities that constitute campus-level decision-making and leadership. Assistant principals often need more training in most areas of the principalship (Madden, 2008). It is generally the assistant principal who is witness to the increasing level of work and stress that is placed on building level principals. According to Viadero (2009), “employment data from 1995 to 2008 concluded that the average tenure over that time was 4.96 years for elementary, 4.48 years for middle school, and 3.38 years for high school principals” (p. 14). Some assistant principals find the job of the principal to be less appealing and therefore do not apply for the position. MacCorkle (2004) conducted a study in which 22% of participants indicated that they were reluctant to move into the principalship because of the time commitment the job required.

The assistant principalship is looked at as the stepping-stone to other administrative roles; the majority of assistant principals can be expected to move up in administration (Dowling, 2007). Current assistant principals see the campus principal take on daily
issues and tasks such as facilitating substitute teachers, lesson plans, discipline, scheduling, curriculum, and custodial and teaching staff (Leone, Warnimont, & Zimmerman, 2009). Providing campus direction and vision are important tasks for leaders but are difficult with the amount of daily issues to which principals must attend. Cusik (2002) stated that applicants see that principals are in a more demanding, more difficult, and less attractive position and decide not to apply for the position.

**Gender and ethnicity.** In regard to gender and career aspirations, the literature suggested that females were more concerned about the impact on family life than males. According to Dowling (2007), females aspire for the position of the assistant principal and males aspire more for the principalship. His reasoning was substantiated by the study’s findings that females were more concerned about the impact the job will have on their personal lives than males. However, Dowling’s study showed close scores between males and females, indicating that impact on personal life was a major deterrent for both males and females.

Reynolds et al. (2008) advocated that schools have a precise succession plan and stressed that there should also be considerations for gender, race, or ethnicity in that plan. The researchers posited that a formal policy or procedure for succession planning can help to identify leaders within schools to address all ethnicities and genders. Whitaker and Vogel (2005) suggested pursuing minorities who are teacher leaders or assistant principals and having them participate in a good mentor program and principal preparation program as a way to address the need for more minorities applying for the principalship (Whitaker & Vogel, 2005).

**Grade level.** In an effort to identify deterrents of possible principal candidates, Mitchell (2009) suggested that school districts take a look at the amount of work and extracurricular duties principals at different grade levels are required to attend. Mitchell wrote,

> The job is indeed difficult with regard to the number of hours, activities, and supervisory duties, which do exceed those of similar positions at the elementary and middle school levels. Perhaps it is time to take a more proactive look at the way salaries are constructed for these principals. (p. 121)

The sentiment was shared by Whitaker and Vogel (2005) whose study summarized that the salary of assistant principals needed to be somewhat comparable to the effort put into the job. They noted that with high assessment standards the stress and workload required of assistants does not commensurate the pay. Gilson’s (2008) research indicated that secondary principals spend most of their time on discipline, classroom issues, classroom observations, paper work, and duties, and less than 30% of their time on professional activities, professional growth, and observations.

Whitaker (2001) stated that although there are a number of principal applicants, districts continue to face a personnel dilemma in finding quality applicants for the principalship at all grade levels. One of the greatest challenges facing the school systems of Virginia is
the recruitment and retention of qualified and certified administrators (Paola & Moran-Tsannen, 2001).

**Methods and Procedures**

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors inhibit or motivate assistant principals to pursue the principalship. This study utilized quantitative methods to determine which of those factors are most prevalent in participants’ decision to pursue the principalship. The study examined: 1) factors that inhibited or increased assistant principals’ desires to obtain the principalship, 2) differences in assistant principals’ desires to pursue the principalship by gender, 3) differences in assistant principals’ desires to pursue the principalship by ethnicity, and 4) differences in assistant principals’ desires to pursue the principalship by school level.

The survey used for the research was a previously used, validated survey created by Bass (2004). Bass’s survey modified an instrument originally constructed by Moore and Ditzhazy (1999) and Harris et al. (2000). The Bass survey was chosen because it was most closely linked to the questions to which the current principal aspiration literature pointed. Sorting factors were selected because several of the items used in the survey were repetitious and thus could be grouped. The survey’s reliability was established by Bass (2004) through comparisons to previous editions of the survey, with Cronbach’s alphas of .80. Face validity was established through a pilot study conducted with a group of professors. Using pilot participants’ advice, questions were changed or rewritten to eliminate problems. The survey also was piloted and given to current aspiring principals and sitting principals to ascertain the survey’s clarity.

School districts in Texas are divided into 20 different regions (Texas Education Agency, 2012); 1,731 K-12 assistant principals in one north Texas region were sent a link to the survey. The survey (created by Bass in 2006) included 38 questions regarding inhibitors and motivators. Respondents selected strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree, indicating how much this inhibitor and motivator influences their decision to seek a principalship. The survey also included questions regarding demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, ethnicity, and level of school (elementary or secondary), and facilitated the identification of factors that most influence an assistant principal’s desire to pursue the principalship.

Two open-ended questions at the end of the survey allowed participants to add any other comments not mentioned in the survey regarding their decision to pursue the principalship. Constant comparative methods were used to analyze the open-ended questions to determine whether the factors found in the data match theories expressed in the literature review. Strauss and Corbin (1990) described open coding as breaking down, examining, and comparing and categorizing the data. Coded data were examined for themes.
Findings

There were 323 surveys (18.7%) completed and submitted. A factor analysis was conducted to identify inhibitor and motivator constructs. Bass’s research (2004) identified six inhibitor and five motivator constructs, but did not describe which survey items aligned with the constructs. Bass’s survey included six factors that accounted for 67% of the variance and five factors that accounted for 51% of the variance, but did not divulge specifically what those factors were. Therefore, his survey questions were used to identify which factors stood out the most, but his factor analysis results were not used. A limitation of the study that can make the results less conclusive is there were only four response choices available for the force-choice questions.

Results from the current study were analyzed and constructs were named and specific items were assigned to each construct. A factor analysis on the current survey data found four inhibitor constructs and three motivator constructs. Bass’s (2006) research was conducted with various groups of aspiring administrators who did not yet hold assistant principal positions rather than current assistant principals, therefore the number of constructs used for this study was reduced to identify primary areas assistant principals identified.

A principal components analysis was conducted on the 36 survey items. The sampling adequacy was measured by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin with an adequacy level of .886 and significance of p< .001. Bartlett’s test of sphericity indicated that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for principal components analysis. The total amount of variance explained was 53.8%, indicating a significant effect size. Four inhibitor constructs and three motivator constructs were identified.

Factors that Inhibit or Increase Desire to Obtain the Principalship

The first research question explored what factors inhibited or increased assistant principals’ desires to obtain the principalship. Four inhibitor and three motivator constructs were identified. The four inhibiting factors were distance from making a personal impact, roles and responsibilities, external forces, and personal impact. The three motivating constructs were influence on change, the challenge the job presented, and influence on personal life. An indicator that had a high mean score meant less concern or that the indicator was less of a motivator and a score with a low mean indicated that participants felt strongly that the specific indicator was a factor in their decision making process when deciding whether to pursue the principalship.

Administrators indicated their largest concern about being a principal was the impact the job would have on them personally (M = 2.07, s.d. = .735). Distance from making a positive impact had the highest mean, indicating participants were not as worried about making a positive impact on the campus because of their distance from students and
classrooms (see Table 1). Roles and responsibilities and external forces had mid-range means, suggesting participants had some concern about the two factors.

Table 1
Ranking of Inhibiting and Motivating Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal impact</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External forces</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from positive impact</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.509</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inhibiting factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on change</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on personal life</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.441</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Motivating factors

In regard to the motivating constructs, the highest mean was influence on personal life, indicating participants were least motivated by the impact the job would have on them personally. Participants responded that the greatest motivator was the challenge that the job would present; the assistant principals welcomed the challenge of becoming a campus principal.

**Desire to Pursue the Principalship by Gender**

The second research question addressed differences in assistant principals’ desire to pursue the principalship by gender. One-way multiple MANOVA was used to compare the inhibiting and motivating factors. The independent variable was gender; motivating factors were the dependent variables. The inhibiting factors were distance from positive impact, roles and responsibilities, external forces, and personal impact (see Table 2).
Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Inhibiting and Motivating Factors by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S. D.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibiting factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal impact</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>.755</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External forces</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.621</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.982</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from direct impact</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.551</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>.404</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on change</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>.435</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>.404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on the personal life</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.449</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The MANOVA for inhibitors by gender was significant [Wilks’ lambda = .952 [F (1, 311) = 4.000, p=.004, $\eta^2 = .048$]. The mean scores indicated how much of an inhibitor or motivator the factor was for the participant. A high mean indicated the factor was less of an inhibitor or motivator, whereas the lower the mean the more of an inhibitor or motivator that factor was. Males were more influenced by external factors (M = 2.35, s.d. = .621) than females (M = 2.52, s.d. = .530) as an inhibiting factor to pursue the principalship (see Table 2). External factors in the survey included bureaucracy, lack of autonomy, and political pressures. Both males and females indicated that their greatest inhibitor was the personal impact the job would have on their lives.

The MANOVA test of between subject effects showed significant difference for the construct external forces [F (1, 314) = 5.97, p = .015, $\eta^2 = .019$]. Males indicated their concern about external forces was a greater inhibitor for the principalship than females (see Table 3). The MANOVA was not significant [Wilks’ lambda = .982 [F (1, 305) = 3.000 p = .139, $\eta^2=.018$] for the motivators by gender, yet females were found to be more motivated by their ability to have an impact on change than males.
Table 3  
*Between Subject Effect Size by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>(\eta^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inhibiting factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal impact</td>
<td>.374</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.374</td>
<td>.694</td>
<td>.405</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External forces</td>
<td>1.911</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.911</td>
<td>5.970</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>1.616</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.616</td>
<td>1.803</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from direct impact</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.271</td>
<td>.603</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>.715</td>
<td>.399</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on change</td>
<td>.800</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.800</td>
<td>4.616</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on the personal life</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Desire to Pursue the Principalship by Ethnicity*

Research question three addressed differences in assistant principals’ desire to pursue the principalship by ethnicity. One-way multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA) were used to compare the inhibiting and motivating factors. The independent variable was ethnicity; dependent variables were the motivating factors. Inhibiting factors were distance from positive impact, roles and responsibilities, external forces, and personal impact.

The MANOVA for inhibitors by ethnicity was not significant [Wilks’ lambda = .960 [F (1, 817) = 4.000, p= .381, \(\eta^2\) = .014]. African American participants were more influenced by the positive influence the job would have on their personal lives (M = 2.20, s.d. = .412) than any other ethnicity (see Table 4). The survey indicated factors that would positively impact participants’ personal lives such as increased salary and job progression. White and African American participants were deterred from applying for the principalship because of the negative impact the job would have on their personal lives such as time away from family and stress.
Table 4  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Inhibiting and Motivating Factors by Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American (N = 43)</th>
<th>Hispanic (N = 20)</th>
<th>White (N = 238)</th>
<th>Multi-racial (N = 15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inhibiting factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal impact</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.702</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External forces</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.919</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from positive impact</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.502</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivating factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.576</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on change</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.476</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on personal life</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.415</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately with the tests of between-subjects effects for ethnicity (see Table 5), the only statistically significant difference was influence on personal life between African American participants and White participants \(F(1, 737) = 5.12, p = .002, \eta^2 = .048\). African American participants reported that influence on their personal lives was more of a motivator compared to White participants.
Table 5
*Between-Subjects Effects by Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influence on change</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>1.697</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on personal life</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.967</td>
<td>5.127</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Desire to Pursue the Principalship by School Level*

Research question four addressed differences in assistant principals’ desire to pursue the principalship dependent on the grade level they served. One-way MANOVA was used to compare inhibiting and motivating factors by grade level (elementary or secondary). The independent variable was grade level; dependent variables were motivating factors (influence on change, challenge, and influence on personal life) or inhibiting factors (distance from positive impact, roles and responsibilities, external forces, and personal impact) (see Table 6).

Differences in inhibiting factors by grade level were not significant [Wilks’ lambda = .963 [F (1, 311) = 3.000 p = .019, η² = .037]. Elementary administrators indicated that external forces proved to be less of an inhibitor to pursuing the principalship than did secondary administrators. These statistics indicate that factors such as politics and bureaucracy were greater inhibitors for elementary assistant principals than for assistant principals at the secondary level.
Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations for Inhibiting and Motivating Factors by Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Elementary (N = 141)</th>
<th>Secondary (N = 168)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibiting factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal impact</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External forces</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>.893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from positive impact</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on change</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>.435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on personal life</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.433</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences in motivating factors by grade level were not significant [Wilks’ lambda = .964 [F (1, 305) = 3.000 p = .011, η² = .036]. Secondary participants indicated more motivation to pursue the principalship because of the challenge it would present than did those at the elementary level. The secondary administrators indicated they would pursue the principalship more for the challenge aspect than would the elementary administrators. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately with the tests of between-subjects effects for grade level (see Table 7), the only statistically significant difference was challenge [F (1, 737) = 4.64, p = .032, η² = .015].
Table 7
*Between-Subjects Effects by Grade Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influence on change</td>
<td>1.250</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.251</td>
<td>4.646</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on personal life</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td>2.434</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two open-ended questions at the end of the survey asked participants about other factors that influenced their decision to pursue the principalship; 141 participants commented about inhibiting and motivating factors in their desire to pursue the principalship. The majority of the comments regarded politics and time/stress as an inhibiting factor and the ability to impact students, teachers, and education as a whole as one of the major motivators. Themes that emerged from those comments included: a) politics is overtaking the ability to initiate true change; b) conflict with central administration; c) family responsibilities; d) stress and workload involved in the job makes it hard to be effective; and e) individuals seeking the position have generally been motivated or encouraged by others to become a principal.

Participants said they felt that obtaining the principalship was a biased process and shared that it was apparent from their previous experiences that applicants were chosen for principal positions because of political reasons and not necessarily because they were the best fit. Participants said this deterred them from wanting to apply for the principalship in the future. Politics within the district was listed as a deterrent for some participants. Participants commented that mandates and decisions made from central office often prohibited campus leaders from doing an effective job.

Family responsibilities and the stress the job would entail were also inhibitors mentioned. Participants said that the stress from the role of principal would conflict with their role as a spouse or parent and that the time away from their families was too great. Stated one assistant principal, “as a mother of three young children, I feel as thought my responsibility as a wife and mother would be very difficult to balance if I took on the additional responsibilities that being a principal holds.” Other responses included comments regarding having to relocate and the extreme stress that candidates feel would be involved with the principalship.

Politics was mentioned by 12 of the participants as a major deterrent for them wanting to pursue the principalship. One participant commented, “district politics often predetermine
who sits in the principal’s chair. The job does not always go to the person best qualified for the job.” Other assistant principals discussed conflicts with central office. Several said that dealing with district officials often convoluted their job as administrators and was a major factor in their decision. Another common concern was the impact the job would have on a participant’s family. Participants said that obligations to their families outweighed their decision to become a principal.

In the pursuit of the principalship, aspiring administrators indicated what their main motivations were to pursue the position. Participants were eager to make a difference and had been encouraged by someone to pursue the principalship. Fifteen participants commented that a family member or school administrator had encouraged them at some point to apply for a principal position. “I was encouraged by my former principal that I was ready to pursue the position,” wrote one participant. “My principal, she encouraged me and told me that I had leadership potential and good people skills,” stated another assistant principal.

One participant wrote that her principal had mentioned to her that she was clearly ready to take on a more challenging position and should apply for a principal position. Another participant wrote that all it took was for her principal to recognize her leadership ability and have enough confidence in her to urge her to pursue the principalship. She knew she was ready for the challenge, but to hear her supervisor tell her she was ready was all the push she needed to pursue a principal position. Participants also commented that their sole purpose in pursuing the principalship was to make a difference in education. One participant mentioned that he felt he could impact more students as a campus principal than as a classroom teacher. Another participant said he would like to pursue the principalship to have a greater impact on the future of education.

**Discussion and Implications**

It is important for educators to know the factors that are drawing and discouraging applicants to the principalship (MacCorkle, 2004; Retelle, 2010). Stakeholders need to continue to encourage quality educational leadership programs and ensure that they are rigorous and relevant in order to produce effective and qualified school leaders (Mitchell, 2009). Likewise, school leaders must also successfully advocate for themselves in a positive, proactive manner to shift the perception of the principalship from a job that no one appears to want to an esteemed, desirable position with both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (Mitchell, 2009).

The motivating factors mentioned by respondents included a job promotion, pay raise, and higher stature within the organization. Data regarding differences in participants’ aspirations by grade level demonstrated that participants at the secondary level were more motivated to pursue the principalship because of the personal and professional challenge they believed the position would hold.
The participants’ greatest inhibitors in this decision was the impact the job would have on their personal lives due to stress and time away from family. Participants also expressed concern that politics played more of a role in obtaining principal positions versus looking at applicants by their qualifications alone. The results of this study are in alignment with the findings of past researchers who posited that applicants’ greatest inhibitor in pursuing the principalship is the stress and impact on their personal lives when deciding to pursue the principalship (Fields, 2005; MacCorkle, 2004; Whitaker & Vogel, 2005).

Participants showed specific differences in their desires for the principalship by gender, ethnicity, and grade level that have implications for districts looking to attract potential principal candidates and address hesitations applicants have about pursuing the job. Males indicated that external forces, such as time constraints, paper work, and political pressures, were main concerns in applying for the principalship. Both males and females were concerned about the negative impact the job would have on their personal lives, such as implications on family responsibilities, stress, and time commitment. Compared to other ethnicities, African Americans were most motivated by the influence the job would have on their personal lives. When examined by grade level, secondary assistant principals were more likely to apply for the principalship for the personal and professional challenges than those at the elementary level.

Summary

Study findings coincided with literature regarding assistant principals’ principalship aspirations. Aspiring administrators can be dissuaded from applying for the principalship after considering the amount of time, stress, and implications it can have on their personal lives (MacCorkle, 2004; Waskiewicz, 1999). To address the shortage of quality principal applicants, districts and administrator preparation programs should analyze the factors that entice aspiring principals to apply (Dowling, 2007; Mitchell, 2009). As school leadership continues to become a more demanding profession, it is critical for leaders to understand and be more proactive in approaches to hiring quality principals and understand what drives assistants to take the next step in applying for the principalship (Garduno, 2009; Reynolds, White, Brayman, & Moore, 2008).

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The word “accountability” has become a mantra in public education. Arguably, this one word, and the movement it has produced, has shaped the direction of our field in the past decade more than any other (Harris, 2011). This movement has led to many positive changes including an examination of gaps in student achievement, the types of assessments used in schools, and the strength of the performance evaluation systems for principals and teachers. Many large urban school districts, as well as entire states, have revamped the way public school principals and teachers are evaluated. In fact many, including the State of Tennessee, Dallas Independent School District, Milwaukee Public Schools, Houston Independent School District, and the State of Illinois, have started or will start using some sort of student achievement metric as part of teacher and/or principal performance evaluations. The ideas surrounding using student growth seem simple enough: If student test scores improve, it means the teacher or principal is doing his or her job well and therefore should be rewarded. This seemingly simple idea is in fact quite complex. Many school administrators may not have the background or training to implement growth models as part of performance evaluations (Mitgang, 2012), which could lead to potentially unethical and incorrect implementation of newer forms of accountability such as growth modeling. Such problems have already arisen in a number of districts across the nation (Harris, 2011).

Training school leaders in the key areas of policy and state laws, basic statistical literacy, assessment types and purposes, and value-added models is particularly important because ideas shaping teacher performance evaluation are being considered at the national, state, and local levels. In fact, we argue that providing school leaders with this background is necessary in order to conduct ethical and effective performance evaluations. In this

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article, we present several key areas for professional development aimed at providing educational leaders with this background. These key areas provide a framework (i.e., called Ethical and Effective Performance Evaluations or $E^2$PE) for designing workshops for educational leaders as they refine practices in conducting ethical and effective performance evaluations of both principals and teachers. Specifically, this article could be helpful to university personnel as they consider how to assist local school districts in implementing effective and ethical performance evaluations of principals and teachers. Often times federal and state laws governing performance evaluations change rapidly. Educational leadership preparation programs teach students what is current at the time they are in the program. The $E^2$PE framework provides an opportunity for university personnel to ensure educational leaders are up-to-date on the latest issues surrounding performance evaluation even if those leaders are not actively enrolled in a formal university certification or degree program. Using the $E^2$PE framework would allow university personnel to engage in out-reach practices with former students and local educational leaders on a regular basis in order to assist them on staying current with the most up-to-date practices for ethical and effective performance evaluations.

Practitioners will find this article helpful as it will give them ideas for the type of high quality professional development needed to support their effective and ethical performance evaluations. Figure 1 depicts our $E^2$PE framework for professional development in conducting effective and ethical performance evaluations. The importance of each foundational area is presented along with ideas about how to implement this framework as a professional development workshop. It should be noted that each foundational area could be presented in any order with the exception of statistical literacy and value-added modeling. Because knowledge of value-added modeling relies heavily on statistical literacy, statistical literacy should always be presented prior to value-added modeling. The order of the remaining components that form the foundation of the $E^2$PE framework could feasibly be presented in the order that works best in the local context.

Figure 1. The $E^2$PE professional development framework.
The Policy Landscape

In order to understand the accountability movement in public education, educational leaders need to have an understanding of the policy landscape that has heavily influenced our current reality in education. Although there are many laws, policies, and court proceedings that have heavily influenced education, *A Nation at Risk*, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top are all directly linked to the accountability movement and should be reviewed in any professional development framework on effective and ethical performance evaluations for school administrators.

Many scholars trace the start of the accountability movement to *A Nation at Risk*, the federal report released in 1983, that highlighted the perceived inadequacies of public education (Berliner, 2011; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Ornstein, 1988). Recommendations from *A Nation at Risk* included more rigorous standards and improved curricula coupled with frequent standardized assessment to ensure standards are being met (Amerin-Beardsley, 2014). Although scholars have since discredited most of the findings from *A Nation at Risk* (Berliner, Berliner & Biddle), the report prompted widespread fear about America’s failing schools and set the wheels in motion for decades of trying to perfect accountability. Because this report had such far-reaching implications, it is important to provide a brief overview in the professional development framework.

The reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), commonly referred to as the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002), was the next big step toward increased accountability. NCLB called for 100% of American children to be proficient in math and reading by 2014; thus, introducing the idea of Adequate Yearly Progress for school districts. School districts as a whole were required to show yearly growth and several subgroups (e.g., based on race, income status, disability status, etc.) within those districts were required to show growth. For each year a school or district failed to show growth, sanctions increased accordingly, culminating in complete restructuring in year five of no growth. NCLB brought “formidable pressure to bear on states, school districts, and schools to meet the demands of the law” (Fowler, 2013, p. 320), but this pressure was deceptive as each state was allowed to develop its own set of learning standards and the corresponding tools to measure progress toward those standards. Public embarrassment occurred for districts and schools as a result of NCLB, but no real educational change occurred (Fowler). At present, the nation is waiting for Congress to re-authorize ESEA, but it has been stalled for a number of years.

Race to the Top (RTTT) is another policy that would be important to review as part of a professional development framework for conducting effective and ethical performance evaluations. In 2009 as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, $4.35 billion was earmarked for RTTT, a competitive grant for states seeking to implement innovative reforms in education. A total of 45 states and Washington, D.C. applied for the grant. Washington D.C. and 18 states were ultimately awarded the grant. Although RTTT is now five years old, several states are still in the process of phasing in the large-
scale changes that resulted from earning the grant. Many of the RTTT states adopted a growth model or value added model as their new system of accountability, which is what makes the development of a workshop on effective and ethical performance evaluations a timely endeavor. It is important for school leaders to understand the historical policy landscape that led us to where we are today, not just for RTTT states, but nationwide.

**Overview of State Laws**

School leaders should also be familiar with state laws concerning performance evaluation. Furthermore, if larger school districts have refined or developed their own performance evaluation systems, that information should be included in the workshop. Using Illinois as an example, in January of 2010 The Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) was signed into law. Part of PERA requires all public school principals and teachers to be evaluated using student growth measures by the 2016 school year. Although the law is clear about the use of “growth measures” and the implementation date, individual school districts, almost 900 in Illinois, can determine their own method of growth assessment. Some growth models are simple and straightforward whereas others are quite technologically sophisticated. Whether state law indicates exactly what each district is to do or gives discretion to each district, a discussion of state law specifics is necessary in a workshop on effective and ethical performance evaluations in order to ensure policy compliance.

In a professional development workshop, policy does not necessarily need to precede law in the manner we have presented here. However, both should be included as part of a professional development workshop on ethical and effective performance evaluations. These issues form the foundation for why we need to address our systems of performance evaluation in the first place. For this reason, both are included in our framework.

**Statistical Literacy**

The concept of “statistical literacy” has been discussed in the scholarly literature for over 20 years (Gal, 2002; Gal & Garfield, 1997; Wallman, 1993). Frameworks detailing the various levels that comprise statistical literacy have been offered by Watson (1997) and delMas (2002). Ideas of how statistical literacy might be defined have been outlined in work conducted by Gal (2000) and Watson. In spite of the importance placed on statistical literacy in the scholarly community, many teacher and principal training programs do not include specific coursework on statistical literacy in educational settings (Chick & Pierce, 2013). Because basic statistical literacy forms the foundation for understanding assessments and value-added models, statistical literacy should be a central theme in professional development on ethical and effective evaluations. For the workshop, the concept of developing and/or promoting “statistical literacy” for the participants could be focused around Rumsey’s (2002, n.p.) components: 1). data awareness; 2). an understanding of certain basic statistical concepts and terminology; 3).
knowledge of the basics of collecting data and generating descriptive statistics; 4). basic interpretation skills; and 5). basic communication skills.

An important aspect of the workshop, and ultimately the framework for providing the workshop, is to assist school leaders in their recurrent exposure to and development of statistical literacy. The workshop’s construct of “statistical literacy” is examined and operationalized via descriptive and inferential statistics as well as measurement concepts such as validity, reliability, and bias. A long-term intention is to support all educational leaders in communicating the importance of data awareness and applying various analyses in an attempt to determine, via the use of interpretation skills, if an idea such as “student growth” transpired and how to communicate said results to a broader base of internal and external constituents.

Assessment Purposes and Uses

Within the realm of the assessment of academic achievement (student mastery of content standards), school leaders need to understand that assessment occurs for a variety of purposes and the data are variously used (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001). The professional development framework includes general and specific assessment purposes and uses (e.g., formative assessment, identifying strengths and weaknesses). In this section, we describe and exemplify the two general assessment purposes, formative and summative, and enumerate the ways formative and summative assessment data can be used.

Formative assessment is intended to support teaching and learning and generally occurs before or during some unit of instruction (Pellegrino et al., 2001). For example, diagnostic assessments, a subtype of formative assessment, might shed light on student strengths, weaknesses, errors, or misconceptions. These data can be used to select appropriate content, determine which students to provide extra support to, which instructional method to use, or how to group students for differentiation. Another sub-category of formative assessment is interim/benchmark assessment, which is intended to indicate whether students’ are on-track to success on future assessments.

In contrast to formative assessment, summative assessment is intended to describe learning that occurred during some unit of instruction (Pellegrino et al., 2001). State mathematics and English/language arts tests in grade 3-8 mandated under No Child Left Behind are a well-known example. Other examples include any traditional test or performance-based assessment administered by a teacher for the purposes of grading. Outside of the classroom, summative assessment data are often used in part to make high-stakes decisions about students such as grade promotion/retention, graduation, and increasingly, to serve accountability uses such as teacher/school/principal evaluation. While most summative assessments focus on student status (level of student knowledge/skill at a fixed point in time such as the end of the school year); the focus of
assessment is increasingly on student growth (change in the level of student knowledge/skill over some time interval such as over the course of the school year).

Not all assessments defensibly support the making of all educational decisions and tests should be designed with the purpose and intended use in mind (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014). School leaders need to have a deep understanding of the appropriate uses of formative and summative assessments so they understand the strengths and limitations of using these types of assessments as part of performance evaluations, as such these discussions should be a key component of any professional development framework on the topic of ethical and effective performance evaluations.

**Value-Added Modeling**

There are several categories of evidence that might be used within performance evaluation systems to support decisions about educators. These include indicators based on student-achievement (including value-added models, student growth percentiles, and unadjusted gains), teaching practice artifacts (e.g., lesson plans and teacher-developed assessments), observations, and student surveys. Amidst debates over the weight apportioned to different types of evidence (Baker et al., 2010), the focus of this section is one type of student achievement-based indicator of teacher effectiveness, namely value-added models. The use of value-added modeling (VAM) involves the application of statistical methods to student test score data with the aim of isolating the impact of individual teachers on students and thus identifying effective and ineffective teachers. Many states and districts have started to use VAMs as part of the evaluation process. Because they can be somewhat complex to understand, a discussion of VAMs should be included in any professional development for ethical and effective evaluations.

VAM methods compare students’ observed achievement test scores to those predicted on the basis of a statistical model. The statistical model allows the estimation of an expectation for each student’s level of achievement, given their prior achievement and possibly other variables (e.g., socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity). Each student’s actual level of achievement is compared to that predicted on the basis of the model, and the discrepancy between these values (the residual) is taken as evidence for the effect of the teachers. Should a teacher’s students typically perform better than they were expected to (“value-added” by the teacher), the inference drawn is that the teacher is more effective than other teachers whose students were represented in the data.

VAM-based indicators are advantageous relative to current achievement indicators such as cohort-to-cohort status comparisons (which depend on both cohort and actual year-to-year changes), and unadjusted gain scores (which depend on where students start). In particular, VAM is an attempt to deal with fairness issues relative to the context in which teachers work. The non-random assignment of students to schools and teachers possibly introduces bias in the comparison of teachers based on simple student achievement
indicators (Easton, 2008; Jennings, 2010; McCaffrey & Lock, 2008). By considering students’ prior academic or other characteristics, VAM can set up more realistic achievement expectations for a given teacher’s students. Thus, a teacher who serves low-achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds is not unfairly penalized under the assumption that her students will be expected to achieve at the same level as their higher-achieving and less disadvantaged counterparts.

However, school leaders need to understand that VAM does not--and perhaps cannot--statistically account for all of the factors that are unevenly distributed across schools and teachers (Corcoran, 2010; McCaffrey & Lock, 2008), including things occurring before (e.g., summer learning loss, nutrition) and during (e.g., tutoring, and absenteeism) the school year. VAM models often omit other potentially important classroom-level factors as well (e.g., social composition, degree of behavioral problems) (Corcoran; Jennings, 2010). To the extent that these factors drive achievement and are distributed unevenly across classrooms, they can offer alternative explanations for VAM results one hopes to ascribe to teacher effectiveness. School leaders should understand that expectations for students are only as good as the appropriateness and comprehensiveness of the variables used to estimate them.

Building upon the background in statistical literacy and understanding of assessment types and purposes, school leaders should be presented with information about the consistency of VAMs. For example, there is some evidence that VAM estimates for individual teachers are unreliable (inconsistent) from year-to-year (Linn, 2008). Issues such as small numbers of students in a class, test exemption, mobility, and absenteeism can all contribute to inconsistency (Corcoran, 2010). At the same time, different VAM models that utilize different tests, and include different variables in the statistical model, often yield different results (Corcoran). Moreover, VAM-based estimates hinge on the quality of the test scores analyzed, in terms of reliability and validity (Linn). For example, if the test scores input to VAM fail to represent all important facets of the content standards (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014), inferences based on VAM-based estimates are restricted to only assessed content. These problems can translate to errors in the identification (misidentification) of effective and ineffective teachers. Another important VAM limitation is that it does not provide diagnostic information about teaching that can be used to support teacher development (e.g., evidence that a teacher is weak in a particular area of practice such as assessment). Given these and other issues, and a lack of extant evidence that VAM demonstrably results in improved teaching and learning, the technical and consequential aspects of VAM models are an active area of educational research (Baker et al., 2010; Harris, 2011).

**Applied Practice**

Once they become more familiar with educational policies, the principles of statistical literacy, assessment types, and value-added models, professional development participants should be given time and assistance during the workshop in applying to
practice ideas such as descriptive statistics, graphing data, inferential statistical models to monitor student growth, and conducting correlations to examine ideas of reliability with summative, interim, and formative assessments. District, school, or classroom level data from workshop participants’ own contexts could be used. Advanced statistical programs, while helpful, are not necessary as Excel could be used in all of the practical experiences and exercises (see Figure 2). If participants are not proficient in use of Excel, the applied practice portion of the workshop could engage them in a primer on the use of Excel both in terms of data entry and conducting basic statistical analyses with their local data (see Figure 3). Group follow-up questions pertaining to results, interpretations, and how to communicate findings and areas for development with teachers in conjunction with local evaluation standards should be encouraged. Specifically, presenters could facilitate questions focused on the interpretation and communication of results with colleagues regarding descriptive statistics as well as score reliability via correlational analysis with interim and formative assessments.

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*Figure 2.* Workshop example of descriptive statistics and graphing use in Excel.
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**Correlation**

$\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{t value} & \text{p-value} \\
0.884 & 4.524 & 0.004
\end{array}$

*Note:* Two-tailed test with 6 df (n-2)

**Study Hours and GPA**

*Figure 3.* Workshop example of correlation use in Excel.

**Concluding Remarks**

The model presented, and its components (i.e., national policy and state laws, basic statistical literacy, assessment types and purposes, value-added models, and applied practice), provides a framework for developing workshops we believe will contribute to promoting effective and ethical performance evaluations of teachers. Such a workshop will provide school leaders with the knowledge and tools necessary to refine practices in conducting ethical and effective performance evaluations. Also, a workshop of this type would assist university personnel when working with local school districts in implementing effective and ethical performance evaluations, and assist practitioners in developing ideas for the types of high quality professional development that would support their effective and ethical performance evaluations.
Secondly, the model emphasizes applied, guided practice, an equally important element of any workshop that develops and promotes effective and ethical performance evaluations of teachers. Within our explanation of each component of the model, we provide ideas for developing a workshop, or series of workshops, that will assist participants in applying and practicing the ideas contained in each component such as discussing the historical policy landscape, graphing data, and conducting correlations to examine ideas of score reliability with assessments. We also strongly encourage the applied practice portion of the workshop utilize district, school, or classroom level data relevant to the workshop participants.

Although the specifics of any workshop will vary, the model and components we presented will provide school leaders, university personnel, and practitioners with a framework that will guide them in implementing effective and ethical performance evaluations of teachers and assist in their work towards “accountability” in public education.

References


Principal Perceptions of Walkthrough Effectiveness

Teresa Martin Starrett
Texas Woman’s University

Teacher quality is the most important school level factor affecting student achievement. There is a direct correlation between effective instruction provided by highly qualified teachers and increased student achievement (Colvin & Johnson, 2007).

In order to ensure students have the most effective teachers, administrators must act as instructional leaders. Specifically, it falls upon them to focus on professional development, monitor and assess the teaching process and create a positive school climate (Gulcan, 2012). While there is much discussion regarding what characterizes an effective teacher, all are in agreement that an effective teacher provides students with positive outcomes - both socially and academically. One of the most important tasks of a principal is the supervision of instruction. For the purpose of this study, a walkthrough is defined as a short 3-5 minute structured review by a campus principal or his or her designee to gain information regarding teacher efficacy (Downey, et al., 2004). Specifically, an effective classroom walkthrough includes:

- components that are informal and brief,
- involving the principal and/or other administrators, other instructional leaders, and teachers,
- quick snapshots of classroom activities (particularly instructional and curricular practices),
- not intended for formal teacher evaluation purposes,
- focused on “look-fors” that emphasize improvement in teaching and learning,
- an opportunity to give feedback to teachers for reflection on their practice,
- having the improvement of student achievement as its ultimate goal (Kachur et al., 2010, p. 3).

The results of these walkthroughs may be used formatively to identify specific needs for professional development or summatively, with a formal observation, for decisions related to employment and retention. Although walkthroughs and observations provide

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data for supervisors, the data collected is very useful to principal leaders in determining what can be done to improve the school.

Tyler, et. al. (2010) state observed that consistent evaluation of teaching could encourage educators to be more self reflective and provide more opportunities for conversations with other teachers and administrations about effective practices in the classroom. They found teachers are more effective at raising student achievement during the school year when they are being evaluated and even more effective in the years after formal evaluation. This teacher effectiveness was evaluated through the use of student assessment scores on math achievement on standardized test scores in the corresponding years. The researchers pose the feedback the supervision programs offer provide teachers with skills that directly correlate with student achievement.

As a result of professional development driven by walkthroughs and observations, either formal or informal, teacher performance should be enhanced; thus, student achievement will invariably improve. Optimally, professional development should be collaboratively chosen by teacher and administrator in response to gaps in teacher training, an effort to increase skills and put practice into place (Kalule & Bouchamma, 2013).

According to a survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2009), 13% of teachers reported they did not receive any appraisal or feedback. Of the teachers who received no appraisal or feedback, just under 25% were in their first year of teaching and 37% were in their first two years at the school.

Conversely, nearly half of all the teachers who responded indicated school leaders used effective methods to evaluate their performance. These teachers indicated they appreciated feedback from school leaders and were more likely to focus on priorities as outlined in evaluations. Obviously, the supervision of instruction falls soundly to the school leader. As evidenced above, however, this frequently does not take place in a systematic way. In order to understand the perceptions of school leaders in regards to supervision, the researcher surveyed multiple Texas school leaders to determine their perceptions about school walkthroughs and their use and effectiveness.

Looney (2011) recommends teacher evaluations be based upon multiple measurements. She states a clearer picture emerges through the uses of multiple observations by competent peers that allow for an opportunity to observe characteristics such as relationships with students, how teachers communicate expectations for student performance and how they guide formation of values.

Methodology

For this study, 20 Texas schools were randomly chosen to participate by using the state of Texas AskTed database of publicly accessed directory material. From this list, a variety of leaders were randomly chosen from the following: rural, suburban, urban, elementary, middle, high school. These leaders were then sent an email invitation asking them to participate in the study gauging their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of
walkthroughs as a supervision tool. If they agreed to participate, they were asked to complete an online survey. The survey was housed in PsychData, a company that provides secure, online surveys. Six school leaders chose to participate in the study by completing the survey.

Leaders responded to demographic information regarding years as a leader and years serving on current campus. Additionally, they responded to eight open-ended questions as follows:

1. Define walkthrough.
2. What is your experience with supervision of instruction?
3. How frequently do you conduct walkthroughs?
4. What do you believe are the benefits of walkthroughs?
5. What do you believe are the constraints of walkthroughs?
6. What is the purpose of supervision of staff?
7. What feedback do you provide?
8. How can walkthroughs be used to improve instruction?

Results were then compiled and a qualitative approach was used to analyze responses for themes.

Results

In response to the question regarding years experience, participants reported an average of 13 years experience with a range of 5 to 24 years in school leadership. Respondents represented leaders from buildings that ranged in size from 176 through 800 and represented elementary, middle and high school. Respondents indicated ratings for participating schools as either met standard (83.3%) or not rated (16.6%).

Classroom walkthroughs are defined as short, focused, and informal observations of students’ involvement in the lesson, instructional strategies utilized by the teacher, and the climate of the classroom (Downey, et al., 2004). Generally, a walkthrough is thought of as a short, focused formal or informal observation that is used to cumulatively gather data regarding teacher performance and provide feedback. When asked for a working definition of walkthrough, the study participants responded in a variety of ways.

Walkthrough defined

When asked to define the term “walkthrough”, responses varied slightly. However, school leaders agreed these functioned as a snapshot of a teacher’s instruction, student engagement and expectations within the classroom. According to responses, administrators spend an average of 3-15 minutes looking at clearly defined objectives focusing on state and district standards. The data gathered during the walkthroughs was then compiled cumulatively over the course of the school year to provide a clearer view to “provide feedback about positives, areas of growth, consideration, or next steps.” Specifically, the consensus was that administrators must have a plan when conducting
walkthroughs. One administrator indicated a need to be purposeful and truly target a specific area since the entire lesson is not seen.

When asked about overall experience with supervision of instruction, administrators responded with a positive view of walkthroughs and stated they made them a priority. The respondents indicated supervision of instruction as one of the main goals as an instructional leader on campus. Another supported Keruskin’s (2005) assertion that supervision creates accountability and correlates to improved instruction. Interestingly, one school leader stated it succinctly as, “You have to inspect what you expect.”

Effective communication between an administrator and teacher is an essential building block to growth for teachers. Supporting this, one principal surveyed indicated walkthroughs are a wonderful tool for dialogue between the teacher and administrator. They give the principal an opportunity to celebrate, share ideas, and challenge the teacher to become the best he/she can be.

**Number of walkthroughs conducted**

The frequency of supervision varies from campus to campus. Frequent walkthroughs and observations are an integral part of the improvement of teacher efficacy as schools where principals employed this model showed evidence of an increase in student achievement over a traditional evaluation system (Payne, 2010). Discussion continues, however, regarding what the correct number is. There is no agreement in the literature regarding the frequency of walkthroughs, but they should provide ongoing instruction related feedback to teachers (Ayers, 2005). When asked about the frequency of their walkthroughs, the responses varied widely three or more to over 100. The average number of walkthroughs per teacher reported was 22 per year.

**Benefits and constraints**

When asked about the benefits of walkthroughs, the true beliefs of these school leaders came through. Many cited the end result as improved instruction and student achievement. According to Keruskin (2005), teachers whose principals conduct frequent walkthroughs have improved attitudes regarding formal teacher evaluation, instruction improves, and student achievement increases.

While often it is difficult to blend research and practice, supervision is an area in which it is essential to cross these lines. One leader stated, “….accountability… utilizing best practices and getting feedback that promotes growth.” Another leader stressed the use of high quality feedback, “If you just walk in and provide feedback on what you are seeing, this probably isn’t a lot of benefit.” Still another leader reiterated the use of constant, ongoing, consistent feedback. In order to provide an opportunity to grow and extend learning, educators must have an opportunity to reflect on practice and feedback provides for such. Liu and Mulfinger (2011) recommend frequent feedback stating this is often too infrequent and not constructive in nature.
Overwhelmingly, school leaders agree walkthroughs and supervision are essential pieces to teacher improvement and student success. However, constraints exist and often impair an administrator’s ability to plan accordingly. These barriers are reported by Bessellieu (2008), as lack of time, interruptions, unpreparedness and unexpected requests.

The survey participants reported similar barriers. Time was the overwhelming reported constraint. School leaders are responsible for a variety of tasks including student safety, scheduling, parent relationships, facility management, budgeting and the supervision of instruction is just one item among them. Additionally, leaders are often called upon to attend meetings outside of the school building; therefore, their contact hours available are limited. According to a Wallace foundation study (Wallace, 2009), when asked how much time spent on instruction, most principals respond roughly 70% and 30% on management tasks. However, when principals are observed and their time spent on tasks is analyzed, the percentages are actually reversed. This same survey found leaders spend roughly 30% of their time on instruction and 70% on management tasks. In order to make supervision a priority, they must be willing to delegate management tasks. One strategy is to utilize a School Administration Manager (SAM) who takes the principal’s most time-consuming management tasks thus allowing the principal to concentrate on instruction.

Another constraint reported was the narrow picture walkthroughs present. One leader indicated conclusions- good or bad- could be drawn from a quick visit that would not be drawn from a complete lesson cycle. Another leader echoed this stating one must be strategic in approaching walkthroughs by being aware of the timing within a lesson. This snapshot effect would be solved if multiple walkthroughs were conducted putting together a comprehensive picture of instruction, thus creating a more complete picture. On each campus, there was shared responsibility for the walkthroughs for teachers. Walkthroughs were conducted by assistant principals, instructional leaders, principals, and in one case the superintendent.

**Purpose of Supervision and feedback**

When asked about the purpose of supervision of staff, the leaders agree that the overarching goal was an improvement of staff performance resulting in positive student achievement. Specifically, one leader stated a need to provide students a learner-centered environment that fosters collaboration and critical thinking. Another shared the purpose of supervision is to ensure a high quality rigorous environment with bell-to-bell instruction. This leader echoes the three areas Marzano (2003) states must be in place in order for student success to occur: high quality instruction, classroom management and an aligned curriculum. Through this response, this leader indicates supervision must ensure teachers are following standards and providing great instruction, classroom management is effective, and that climate and culture of the classroom is consistent with the school vision.
According to Hopkins (2008), one of the most important components of effective supervision is providing feedback and the opportunity for professional development. When asked what feedback they provided teacher with after walkthroughs, these principals indicated the key was simply ensuring this feedback was, indeed, followed through upon. It did look different from case to case, however. Some leaders met individually with teachers and asked for reflection on the lesson. Specifically, “… what they thought went well and what they feel they struggle with… then I tell them what I saw that was awesome, and what might need tweaking. It is very non-threatening.” Others approach with a positive/negative approach providing an area in which the teacher did well and another in which they might need additional refinement. These school leaders had various ways of referring to this technique including: “praise-polish-praise”, “reinforcement-refinement” and “positives-needed growth”.

Other leaders utilized a computerized system that provided feedback through the school’s online system. Teachers are then able to access this information to determine areas of improvement. Prior walkthroughs are then used for comparison data for future walkthrough visits to determine whether areas of concern have been addressed.

**Walkthroughs to improve instruction**

In regards to how walkthroughs can be used to improve instruction, one leader indicated data can be tracked to determine trends. Patterns and concerns related to instruction can more easily be identified, school principals can demonstrate their interest in what is occurring in the classroom, and a basis for reflective dialogue can be established through the use of an informal observation process (Waite, 2007).

If a negative trend is found, it can be utilized to improve instruction. If positive trends are found, those teachers can be tapped to provide professional development as an instructional coach. According to one leader, when a teacher is doing a great job in a certain area, they are asked to share the practice with their Professional Learning Community (DeFour, 2006). “Teachers learn best from each other and they enjoy sharing so it benefits all students.” On the same campus, if a teacher is in need of assistance, an instructional coach is sent to offer more assistance. It is through the walkthroughs that a snapshot emerges. This snapshot provides a needs assessment allows the leadership to design professional development that best meets each teacher’s needs. This belief is echoed by another leader who states, “All teachers want to be good at what they do, but they don’t necessarily know what they are doing isn’t working or isn’t the best, but through feedback they are able to see the flaws in their methodology.” In reviewing the recommended cycle of observation and evaluation, Kalule & Bouchamma (2013) stress the importance of providing teachers with the opportunity to reflect on strengths and weaknesses with guided questioning by a skilled instructional leader. All leaders who responded indicated a need for post observation coupled with opportunities for reflection.
Overwhelmingly, school leaders placed great emphasis on frequent walkthroughs, teacher feedback and reflection. Through the use of these tools, an improvement in teaching will occur. When teaching improves, the end result is student growth and achievement.

References


Family Involvement Strategies of Asian Students with High Achievement in Middle School Mathematics: A Phenomenological Study

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The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that schools maintain policies, strategies, and practices that support parental involvement in the education of all children (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). Houtenville and Conway (2008) found that by implementing strategies which promote family engagement in the educational process, schools can save up to one thousand dollars per child in education expenses per year.

However, in spite of the challenges faced by minority learners, Asian American students have been perceived as super-achievers, particularly in mathematics, where they are seen as having “superior math abilities” (Wing, 2007, p. 467). According to Alvarez (2012) and Shalash (2013), some states in the U.S. institutionalized differentiation in academic achievement standards along ethnic and racial lines. For example, minimum standards for achievement in math that have been set in Virginia and Florida are higher for Asian Americans than for Whites, and much higher than for Blacks and Latinos.

Thus, there is a call from within the field of educational research to identify the involvement strategies used by Asian American families (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Hill and Tyson (2009) noted, “Other than with African Americans, the body of literature on parental involvement in middle school does not include sufficient studies of other sizable ethnic groups, such as Latinos or Asian Americans” (p. 760). Also, Yoder and Lopez (2013) noted that research on parental involvement often fails to highlight the perspectives of uninvolved parents of the minority population. They stated, “Studies that can access uninvolved parents are needed to better understand the experiences of a parent’s involvement in children’s education” (p. 431).

This qualitative, phenomenological narrative study explored the involvement strategies used by families of Asian American students who consistently achieved high in middle-school mathematics. Participants were parents of middle-school Asian-American students whose achievement in math was consistently 80% or higher. The school was a middle-school in a charter school in Southeast Texas. The overarching question in this study was: What involvement strategies do Asian American families use that motivate their children to achieve high in middle school mathematics? By identifying and exposing these

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strategies, schools may benefit by steering parent involvement efforts as mandated in Title I of the NCLB Act toward strategies that increase their overall effectiveness.

**Summary of the Literature**

There is an extensive research literature, framed within parental involvement in the academic lives of their children (Crespo-Jimenez, 2011; Flores, 2007; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Orkazaki, 2009; Pomerantz & Moorman, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Yin-Jin & Acock, 2013; Yoder & Lopez, 2013) from which support for this study was drawn. A limited number of the studies in literature have been briefly discussed.

*Cultural values of Asian American families.* Sue and Okazaki (2009) examined the connection between high academic achievement by Asian Americans and some selected cultural factors (such as child-rearing practices, virtues that extol education, personality, heredity, socialization experiences) and argued that making such connections can lead to disputes involving “cultural superiority or deficits” (p. 45).

*Language used in the Asian American family.* Boroditsky (2011) suggested that different languages impact cognitive skills in different ways. According to Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (2006) language is a profound source of cultural learning because the acquisition of other cultural knowledge and values occurs through use of language. Children in the company of other individuals in their environment are programmed to learn and acquire languages and sign systems used around them. Cushner et al. also argued that language is one of the sociocultural factors that lead to development of learning styles which bears significant impact on a child’s educational outcome.

According to the United States Department of Education [USDOE] (2005), up to 79% of Asian American adolescents have knowledge of both English language and a second heritage language. Yee et al. (2007) suggested that being bilingual or multilingual enhances not only a student’s cognitive ability but also confers on them certain social advantages such as: divergent thinking, metalinguistic awareness, problem-solving capabilities, and intercultural interactive skills.

*Nature of Parent-child Interaction.* Child development theorists, Grolnick, Deci, and Ryan (1999) emphasized that the nature of parent-child interaction is critical not only to children’s motivation to learn but also to how children internalize certain social behaviors. For example, if a mother and child share a warm and caring relationship the child may develop positive motivation toward learning from the experience. On the other hand, if the interaction is confrontational and less warm it may impact the child’s motivation negatively.

*Influence of Community and Environment.* Su and Hynie (2011) investigated the impact of some community and environmental factors on parenting practices of mothers of selected mainland Chinese, Canadian Chinese, and European Chinese students. They found that immediate social environment influenced parenting practices in a significant
way. Su and Hynie suggested that social environment interacted with family culture to shape parenting practices that ultimately impacted child’s development in a positive way.

**Methodology**

**Research questions**

The overarching question in this study was: What involvement strategies do Asian American families use to motivate their children to achieve in middle school mathematics? The following research questions further guided the direction of this study:

1. In what way does the culture of the student’s family influence academic achievement?
2. In what way does the parent-child interaction in the family influence academic achievement?
3. In what way does the larger Asian community engage with the student to influence academic achievement?

This study was conducted at a 6th through 12th grade charter high school in a Southeast Texas independent school district. The school had a diverse student population typical of the demographic in that part of the state. The site in this study had a population of 977 students.

**Participants**

Selection of the participants in this study was purposeful. Selection began by identifying students who met the following criteria: (a) must be in either sixth, seventh, or eighth grade; (b) be from Asian-American identity; (c) have a record of achievement in mathematics that is not below 80%; and (d) must live in a household with either or both parents or non-parent care-giver. The researcher created a pool of potential participants using a snowball sampling technique whereby key PTA (Parent Teacher Association) members helped to identify students who met the criteria. After the students were identified, the researcher compiled a list, ranking the students in order, from the highest-achieving to the lowest-achieving (not below 80%) in middle-school mathematics. Achievement was determined by the scores received by the students on standardized math tests taken in grades six through eight. Only the parents of the students identified were involved as participants in this study.

**Data collection**

After obtaining the approval of the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and receiving informed consent from the selected participants, the primary data collection method for this study was consistent with acceptable methods in phenomenological investigation. Moustakas (1994) recommended that a qualitative inquirer employ a variety of data collection methods such as, interviews, observations, and written
documents in order to gather extensive details about the phenomenon being studied. This study included face-to-face in-depth, open-ended interviews and field notes that were collected at the homes of the participants.

**Treatment of the data**

The researcher followed recommendations by Creswell (2013) for phenomenological explicitation of data. Explicitation of data, as explained by Hycner (1999) involves an exploration of the components of the interview data while keeping context of the phenomenon intact. The recorded audio was transcribed by the researcher using Express Scribe transcription software that was available for Windows 8. Thereafter, the data were scrutinized to identify all the textural descriptions of the essence, also termed the “what” of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014, p. 301).

**Findings**

The participants’ narratives were examined for common themes using the order in which the research questions were posed. The commonalities discovered in the responses revealed the perception held by the participants about involvement strategies that promote high achievement.

The major findings in this study are summarized by research questions. Research question one explored the influence of family culture on achievement and the following themes emerged: Valuing multiple languages spoken within the family; cognitive ability in math; structure and discipline; and positive adult role-models.

The second research question investigated the nature of parent-child interaction and the following themes emerged: Warmth, and consistent involvement from earlier on in the life of the child. Research question three explored the influence of engagement with the larger Asian community and revealed the following emergent themes: Religion; social-emotional support; problem-solving teams; and community mentorship.

**Discussion**

Overall, this study concluded that the families of high-achieving students valued and communicated in more than one language at home. In addition, they indoctrinated their children with a high-achievement mindset from earlier on in their lives. Other related conclusions and implications are discussed below in greater detail based on the three research questions.

**Research question one.** This question investigated the influence of the family culture on the academic achievement of the student. The emergent themes lead to the conclusion that the culture in Asian families is education-focused and induces a high-achievement
mindset in their children. This is consistent with recent studies. For example, according to Jimenez and Horowitz (2013), in the perception of Asian American students “an Asian fail means a ‘B’ or ‘B+’ on a school assignment while a ‘white fail’ signifies receiving an ‘F’ grade” (p. 11). Also, Lee and Zhou (2013) reported similar findings based on the result of a qualitative study in which the concept of frames was applied in exploring perceptions of some second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese American students on educational achievement. For their respondents “high school was mandatory, college was an obligation, and only after earning an advanced degree does one deserve kudos” (p. 215).

Also, another conclusion is that valuing communication in multiple languages had a positive influence on the academic achievement of their children. Boroditsky (2011) suggested that different languages impact cognitive skills in different ways. According to Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (2006) language is a profound source of cultural learning because the acquisition of other cultural knowledge and values occurs through use of language. Children in the company of other individuals in their environment are programmed to learn and acquire languages and sign systems used around them. Cushner et al. also argued that language is one of the sociocultural factors that lead to development of learning styles which bears significant impact on a child’s educational outcome.

**Research question two.** This question explored participants’ experiences using the following question: In what way does the parent-child interaction in the family influence academic? Findings in this study lead to the conclusion that warm interaction and consistent involvement from earlier on in the lives of the students are common strategies used by Asian parents. Child development theorists, Grolnick, Deci, and Ryan (1999) emphasized that the nature of parent-child interaction is critical not only to children’s motivation to learn but also to how children internalize certain social behaviors. For example, if a mother and child share a warm and caring relationship the child may develop positive motivation toward learning from the experience. On the other hand, if the interaction is confrontational and less warm it may impact the child’s motivation negatively.

**Research question three.** This question explored the way in which engagement with the larger Asian community influenced academic achievement. Responses revealed four emergent themes namely, religion, socio-emotional support, problem-solving teams, and community mentorship that produce a synergistic influence on students’ educational outcome. This leads one to conclude that engagement with co-ethnic adults at community centers provided mentoring support which promoted social-emotional development in the adolescents. This is consistent with an earlier study in which Su and Hynie (2011) found that social environment interacted with family culture to shape parenting practices that ultimately impacted child’s development in a positive way.
In addition, positive influence of the community was emphasized by Lee and Zhou (2013) who found that because Asian American students are able to access ethnic resources in their social environment, they have a competitive advantage that helps them achieve academically, regardless of the socioeconomic status of their families. Ethnic resources include after-school tutoring help, supplementary educational programs, and college preparation classes.

**Implications for Practice**

This study uncovered best family involvement practices that helped children of the participants to achieve high in middle-school math. Implications for practice, informed by the emergent themes from this study are discussed below.

*Encourage communication in more than one language.* It was revealed that more than one language was used as a medium of communication in the households of respective participants. Yee et al. (2007) suggested that being bilingual or multilingual enhances not only a student’s cognitive ability but also confers on them certain social advantages such as: divergent thinking, meta-linguistic awareness, problem-solving capabilities, and intercultural interactive skills. Also, Boroditsky (2011) suggested that different languages impact cognitive skills in different ways. Therefore it is instructive that parents encourage communication in more than one language as they interact with children at home.

*Establish discipline and structure at home.* Setting and enforcing the right structure at home helped the participants maintain a home environment that was conducive for learning. One of the participants claimed, “There is structure in my family. High expectations are set early in the lives of our kids and every family member knows what roles to fulfill in order for the child to meet expectations.” There was support for this claim in literature. For example, Chua (2011) euphemized the authoritarian parenting practices in an Asian American family by referring to a mother as a tiger and the children as cubs. Chua stated “academic achievement reflects successful parenting” (p. 1). Lee (2014) agreed and noted that the structure in an Asian American family supports parenting practices which are more likely to produce “math whizzes” and “music prodigies” because the “Tiger Mother” (p. 38) knows how to use cultural formula for educational success.

*Leverage community co-ethnic resources.* Encourage family participation in community center activities such as religious festivities. Positive influence of community involvement was emphasized by Lee and Zhou (2013) who found that because Asian American students are able to access ethnic resources in their social environment, they have a competitive advantage that helps them achieve academically, regardless of the socioeconomic status of their families. Ethnic resources include after-school tutoring help, supplementary educational programs, and college preparation classes. Another factor, according to Lee (2012) is availability of non-tangible resources through ethnic networking, such as ethnic newspapers and informal co-ethnic forums that provide ethnic...
group members information about school ranking, tutoring, school districts that have reputation for student-centered focus, and Advanced Placement classes.

Conclusion

Overall, this study concluded that the families of high-achieving students valued and communicated in more than one language at home. In addition, they indoctrinated their children with a high-achievement mindset from earlier on in their lives. It was hoped that this study has exposed strategies that families of other minority groups might find useful to help their children to achieve more. Also by identifying and exposing these strategies, schools may benefit by steering parent involvement efforts as mandated in Title I of the NCLB Act toward strategies that increase their overall effectiveness.

References


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