

## ABSTRACT

ROYAL, WENDY LENETTE. Utilizing the Assistant Principalship as a Training Ground for the Principalship. (Under the direction of Dr. Kenneth Brinson, Jr.)

The purpose of this research has been to suggest an organization for a program to better prepare assistant principals for the principalship. The research was needed for three reasons. First, assistant principals come to the position with varied professional histories and experiences (years of service, positions held, graduate programs). Second, the job descriptions and evaluation instrument objectives for assistant principalships often vary greatly from the actual tasks and duties carried out by the administrator due to the leadership theories and styles adopted by the principal. Finally, research shows that new principals do not feel adequately prepared to handle all the facets of their position.

Through interviews with first and second year principals in public schools in North Carolina, it was determined that new principals felt unprepared or challenged by certain tasks or general areas related to their job. These topics focused on management and leadership. Management issues included budget and finance, facilities' management, organizational issues (scheduling and school system programs, policies and procedures), personnel relations and customer service and public relations. Leadership issues included decision making, school improvement planning, curriculum and instruction (testing and accountability, exceptional children, and instructional programs), and professional development (technology and current topics).

The research proposed an organizational plan for a program to better prepare assistant principals for the principalship which was rooted in the constructivist notion that learning is best achieved by doing. The program is organized through monthly assistant principals' meetings, facilitated by the superintendent's designee. The topics noted as

areas of challenge by the principals interviewed are divided into ten sections, one for each month's meeting, with suggestions for content and hands-on activities for each topic.

**UTILIZING THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALSHIP AS A TRAINING  
GROUND FOR THE PRINCIPALSHIP**

by  
**WENDY LENETTE ROYAL**

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Chair of Advisory Committee

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, who give me tons of unconditional love and are proud of every little thing I do.

## BIOGRAPHY

Wendy Royal lives in Clinton, North Carolina, where she was born and raised. She graduated from Clinton High School as valedictorian of her class in 1990. She attended Meredith College as an Honor Scholar and North Carolina Teaching Fellow and graduated Summa Cum Laude in 1994 with a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics/Computer Science and a minor in statistics. While attending Meredith College, Wendy also obtained secondary certification in mathematics and an endorsement in computer education. After teaching mathematics for three years at Clinton High School, she attended the University of North Carolina at Wilmington as a North Carolina Principal Fellow and graduated in 1999 with a Masters of School Administration. Proceeding graduation, Wendy was employed with Duplin County Schools as an assistant principal. She entered the Educational Administration and Supervision doctoral program at North Carolina State University in the fall of 2000 and graduated in May of 2003. Wendy is currently the assistant principal at Warsaw Middle School and can be reached at [wendy@intrstar.net](mailto:wendy@intrstar.net).

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Background.....	1
School Administration Programs in North Carolina.....	3
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Significance of the Issue.....	6
Research Questions.....	9
Limitations.....	10
Summary.....	10
Review of Related Literature.....	12
Introduction.....	12
The Assistant Principalship.....	13
Introduction.....	13
Prior Experiences for Assistant Principals in North Carolina.....	13
Motivation to Enter the Field.....	14
The Job Description.....	15
The Job.....	19
Assistant Principal Reactions.....	20
Cause of Discrepancies: Leadership Theory.....	22
Trait Theories.....	23
Behavioral Theories.....	23
Participatory leadership.....	23
Instrumental leadership.....	23
Contingency Theories.....	24
Transformational and transactional leadership.....	24
Situational leadership.....	25
Conclusion.....	25
Summary.....	26

The Principalship.....	27
Introduction.....	27
Previous Research.....	27
Summary.....	28
Developing the Assistant Principalship into a Training Ground.....	28
Introduction.....	28
Issues to be Addressed.....	29
Summary.....	30
Pilot Study.....	30
Background.....	30
Findings.....	33
Recommendations and Implementation.....	34
Summary.....	36
Methodology.....	38
Introduction.....	38
Theoretical Framework.....	38
Subjectivity.....	42
Sampling Procedure.....	43
Data Collection.....	44
Interviewing.....	44
Triangulation.....	45
Data Analysis.....	47
Ethical Issues.....	48
Validity.....	50
Summary.....	52

Findings.....	54
Introduction.....	54
Background Information.....	54
The Education of Administrators.....	57
The Assistant Principalship.....	59
Responsibilities and Duties.....	59
Being Prepared to Assume the Principalship.....	62
The Principalship.....	64
Responsibilities and Duties.....	64
Sources of Assistance.....	67
Preparing Assistant Principals for the Principalship.....	68
Topics.....	70
Management.....	71
School Finance.....	72
Facilities' Management.....	75
Organizational Issues.....	76
Scheduling.....	76
District programs, policies and procedures.....	78
Personnel Relations.....	79
Customer Service.....	83
Summary.....	85
Leadership.....	85
Decision Making.....	86
School Improvement Planning.....	88
Curriculum and Instruction.....	90
Professional Development.....	93
Summary.....	95

Implementation and Future Research.....	97
Introduction.....	97
Participant Suggestions.....	97
Program Organization.....	99
Schedule of Topics and Activities.....	100
Limitation of the Program.....	107
Ideas for Future Research.....	109
Conclusion.....	110
Bibliography.....	113
Appendix A – Analysis of the MSA Programs of Four North Carolina Universities....	118
Appendix B – Participant Letter.....	123
Appendix C – Interview Outline.....	124
Appendix D – Interview Transcripts.....	126

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

New principals often express frustration during their first year as the leader of a school. The frustration comes in part because of the variety of skills needed to carry out the position with competence. A recent study (Edlefsen, 2000) notes roles for principals which include being a leader of leaders by sharing decision making. The roles also stress that a principal should be an advocate for teachers by finding needed resources and should be a catalyst for change by creating a climate for taking risks and assessing progress. Daresh (1986) adds that principals need technical expertise in personal areas such as conflict management and procedural areas such as budgets. Principals should relate to the teaching staff in a collegial manner, share decision-making, assess the strengths and weaknesses of the staff and help them choose appropriate professional development activities, create an environment that supports risk-taking, and locate and secure resources (Efdelson, 2000).

Principals must meet all of the demands noted simultaneously, which places them in a very frustrating position. Kelly (1983) states that second year principals feel they know what they should be doing but have feelings of guilt because they do not have time and are not providing the leadership they learned about in the theory courses of their preparation programs. Specifically, principals' greatest challenges are delegating responsibility, becoming familiar with school operations, becoming familiar with the role of principal and becoming familiar with the school while their greatest frustrations are adjusting to the role of principal and the amount of authority and responsibility that accompany the position (Kelly, 1983; Lyon, 1993; Efdelson, 2000). Principals are most unfamiliar with school-community relations, school business management and staff personnel administration but feel most

prepared in dealing with curriculum and instruction and student related issues such as discipline and attendance (Lyons, 1993).

In addition to dealing with the inadequacies principals believe themselves to have, others have expectations as to the skills of principals. Teachers, for example, want principals to be more visible, be more supportive, have an open door policy, hold more relevant, and interesting faculty meetings, use more positive reinforcement, and be more organized (Giannangelo & Malone, 1987). They want principals to focus more on empathizing with others and focus less on evaluating programs and teacher performance (Schmieder, McGrevin & Townley, 1994). They feel that principals should be leaders of instruction, managers of the building, directors of community relations, setters of the school tone and climate, and disciplinarians (Giannangelo & Malone, 1987). According to superintendents, principals should have vision, demonstrate the desire to make a difference in the lives of staff and students, know how to evaluate staff, understand that change is on-going and be aware of their biases, strengths and weaknesses (Schmieder et al., 1994).

Personal expectations of the new administrators, as well as those of teachers and superintendents, mentioned above, can cause a great deal of confusion and frustration. They naturally turn to others for support. A Lyons (1993) study found that 46% of new principals surveyed noted that veteran principals serve as the greatest source of assistance because they can share lessons learned from experiences over time. About 31% of the participants received the greatest assistance from the school secretary and other office staff while 8% found assistant principals and assistant superintendents to be most helpful.

The research presented suggests that first year principals often find their position frustrating. They must meet the demands of the principalship and the expectations of

teachers, parents and central office personnel. The cultural and technical aspects of the school and school system are often foreign to new administrators. Some take it upon themselves to turn to experienced principals and others for help who offer support by sharing information, suggestions and experiences. Others choose to accept the challenge alone, often floundering through the first year.

The feelings expressed by principals with regards to their first year in the principalship illuminate the fact that providing help and support for new principals is not enough. Help and support must also come before the new principal enters the principalship. Therefore, the issue becomes one pertinent to assistant principals and the experiences which can most effectively prepare them to assume the principalship.

#### *School Administration Programs in North Carolina*

Administrative certification has been available to North Carolina educators for many years. In 1993, however, school administration programs throughout institutions of The University of North Carolina system began to see major changes as a response to the General Assembly's House Bill 257. The Bill was the product of the Educational Leadership Task Force established by the N.C. General Assembly in 1991.

The Bill established a competitive proposal process for school administrator programs through which seven programs at various campuses of The University of North Carolina system would be selected to remain active. All other programs were be phased out. In addition to the proposal submitted by each competing campus, other factors which influenced the decision of the Task Force were: "(i) the historical background of the institution in training educators; (ii) the ability of the sites to serve the geographic regions of the State, such as the far west, the west, the triad, the piedmont, and the east; and, (iii)

whether the type of roads and terrain in a region make commuting difficult” (1993, House Bill 257, p.2). House Bill 257 further noted that the Board of Governors would annually determine the number of school administrators to be trained in the programs.

The campuses chosen as a result of House Bill 257’s proposal process, and those subsequently allowed to reinstate school administration programs in recent years, had to address the following issues and show that their programs achieve the following expectations:

- Meet standards proposed by professional associations in the area of educational leadership;
- Demonstrate a significant commitment of campus resources;
- Employ entrance standards and criteria that will attract high-quality applicants inclusive of women and racial minorities;
- Reflect a vision for leadership for the public schools;
- Are interdisciplinary in design, and interprofessional in nature;
- Reflect collaboration with local school units, professional associations, and industry and business;
- Employ varied methods of instruction;
- Integrate clinical components throughout the program;
- Contain plans for the continual professional development of program faculty;
- Emphasize a common core of knowledge and skills grounded in problems of practice, such as societal and cultural influences on schooling, teaching and learning processes,

current school improvement and reform, organizational theory, policy analysis, leadership, and management skills, including strategic planning; and

- Provide students with a significant, active, full-time internship experience that (i) is an extension of earlier clinical experiences; (ii) is planned and supervised by a well-trained mentor; and (iii) extends over a minimum of one school year

(1993, House Bill 257, p.2-3).

### Statement of the Problem

House Bill 257 and other literature focus on school administrator programs at the university level; however, there is an omission in the literature with respect to *grooming* assistant principals for the principalship through professional development including knowledge, support and experiences. Golanda (1991) stresses that assistant principals can not experience leadership by watching. They must be allowed to *do* leadership. For the purposes of this study, the “leadership” described when speaking of the principalship will include both leadership skills and management skills as Robbins and Alvy (1995) claim the leadership and management of the principal’s role are inseparable and Holman and Gonzalez (1993) agree that “principals are expected to be both managers and instructional leaders” (p.34).

Because the personalities and leadership styles of principals differ, assistant principals’ opportunities to *do* leadership vary. Many assistant principals are not afforded opportunities to participate in activities that they will ultimately assume responsibility for as principals. Existing literature about principal preparation programs focuses on the components of Master of School Administration programs including coursework and

internships (Pellicer & Buford, 1982; Kelly, 1983; Vornberg & Davis, 1997). Additional literature highlights the challenges faced by novice principals (Lyons, 1993; Schmieder et al., 1994; Andrews, 1989).

Further research was needed to generate suggestions regarding the development of knowledge and skills of assistant principals; suggestions that may enable them to feel better prepared when placed in a principalship; suggestions that may allow them to *do* leadership. To accomplish the task, I chose to use the applied research methodology since its purpose is to “Contribute knowledge that will help people understand the nature of a problem in order to intervene, thereby allowing human beings to more effectively control their environment” (Patton, 2002, p.217). Since I am an assistant principal myself, I believe this method is effective for approaching the problem of training assistant principals since “Applied qualitative researchers are able to bring their personal insights and experiences into any recommendations that may emerge” (Patton, 2002, p.217).

In conducting the research, I interviewed principals who have completed a maximum of two years in the principalship. I employed in-depth interviewing to determine their perceived successes and frustrations of their first year as principals, including their perceptions of readiness for the tasks they completed. A small number of interviews were first conducted in my school system as part of a pilot study. After approval by the Institutional Review Board of North Carolina State University, research participants from public schools throughout southeastern North Carolina were interviewed.

#### Significance of the Issue

The position of assistant principal has evolved over the last few decades. In the past, the administrative office of a school consisted of the principal and the secretary. Initially, many

beginning principals were promoted straight from the classroom. University graduate programs were responsible, therefore, for training teachers to become principals (Spradling, 1989). Today, the assistant principalship is a standard position in the vast majority of public schools and new principals have often paid their *administrative dues* as assistant principals (Spradling, 1989). As a result, Master of School Administration programs, such as the programs at North Carolina State University, East Carolina University, Fayetteville State University and The University of North Carolina at Wilmington, often include full-year internships under the supervision of a certified public school principal and a university professor, with monthly seminars reflect on and discuss the administrative experiences of candidates in addition to a comprehensive schedule of graduate courses.

According to Golanda (1991), the primary role of the assistant principal is to assist the principal and make his/her job easier; therefore, the assistant principal's own training for the principalship takes secondary importance. His or her responsibilities are usually determined by the principal and have little value as meaningful leadership activities. As a result, administrators in their first principalship discuss needs such as practical information on current issues, information on the politics of education and training to reflect on many areas including conflict management, human relations, negotiation issues, time management, and budget (Schmieder et al., 1994).

Research conducted by Schmieder and other researchers (1994) serves as evidence that the responsibilities and opportunities of the assistant principalship do not properly prepare an administrator for the principalship. In fact, many long-term assistant principals lose the leadership skills they possess because they are not utilized and many who feel they

are becoming career assistant principals either give up their ambition or take other positions (Golanda, 1991).

Assistant principals who do become principals often feel ill-prepared to assume the position. A superintendent in southeastern North Carolina said that one of his first year principals stated, “Nothing prepared me to sit in *the* [principal’s] chair.” The superintendent stated that he often hears similar comments from first year principals and longs to find a way to avoid such feelings of unpreparedness in the new leaders of his schools. Melvin (1977) agrees that “the preparation of future principals is one of the profession’s most important endeavors” (p.54). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to develop recommendations which, when implemented, may better prepare assistant principals for the principalship.

Another reason better principalship preparedness is needed is to formalize the current variety which occurs in administrative experiences. The assistant principalship may vary greatly from district to district and school to school. Golanda (1991) adds that an assistant principal hired by the principal is more likely to get training than those hired by the central office or superintendent. I believe that the training of an assistant principal should not be solely dependent upon the principal and his/her leadership theory and style.

Howley (1986) believes that the assistant principalship should be a training ground. Particularly, his research asserts that the best training for assistant principals involves switching roles with the principal and teaching classes as a means of having exposure to instructional leadership and concerns. Hall and Guzman (1984) feel that assistant principals should not always work as a team with principals but often have full duties delegated to them. Lindsay (1985) adds that deliberate skill building is essential so assistant principals should be given jobs which target tasks and skills needing particular attention.

## Research Questions

Since limited research exists regarding the preparation of assistant principals to successfully assume the principalship, the goal of the present research project was to answer the following questions:

- What bodies of knowledge are assistant principals exposed to in Master of School Administration programs? (What do assistant principals bring to the position? What information has been presented to them and what skills have been developed?)
- What skills/tasks are typically associated with the assistant principalship? (Do assistant principals get to apply the knowledge they were exposed to and the skills they developed in Master of School Administration programs? How much of a connection exists between the two?)
- What skills/tasks should an administrator obtain/master to make their first year as a principal more successful? (Are these the skills/tasks that assistant principals get to practice? Why or why not?)
- How can the assistant principalship be redesigned to better prepare assistant principals for the principalship? (How can needed knowledge best be shared with assistant principals? How can assistant principals best be trained to master the skills/tasks needed for the principalship?)

Just as teachers connect their daily instructional objectives to the students' prior learning, educational administration should be constructed in a similar fashion. The answers to the research questions provided an overview of administration and determined if the much needed connections exist.

## Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by the size and location of the sample. All participants are principals of public schools in North Carolina, with the majority serving in the southeastern part of the state. The ideal sample is a comprehensive one but other factors, such as time, limit the number of principals who participated in the study. To address the issue of sample size and location, I chose a sample with a wide variety of experiences. All participants received training as an assistant principal in different school systems and served for varying numbers of years both in the classroom and in the assistant principalship. I also addressed the limitation of the sample size in my method of data collection, in-depth interviewing. While choosing in-depth interviewing limits the sample size because of the length of time involved, it also allows for technical efficiency. I got the richest information in the shortest amount of time by allowing the participants to *tell their story* with only a few open-ended, guiding questions.

## Summary

Administrators often express feelings of inexperience and unpreparedness when speaking of their first year in the principalship (Kelly, 1983; Lyons, 1993). Many researchers have focused on the preparation provided to budding administrators by Master of School Administration programs. Other research centers on providing assistance for administrators during their first year of the principalship. Very little attention has been given to the use of the assistant principalship as a training ground for future principals.

This study sought to determine the needs of first year principals by employing an applied research methodology, which “seek(s) findings that can be used directly to make practical decisions about, or improvements in, programs and practices to bring about change”

(Bodgen & Bicklen, 1997, p.209). The needs were determined through a review of related literature and by interviewing administrators who have completed no more than two years in the principalship. Recommendations were then made as to how those needs could be addressed during the assistant principalship, allowing assistant principals to *do* leadership. The results were suggestions for a program that may enhance the assistant principalship and produce first-year principals who experience more successes and fewer frustrations.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Introduction

Reviewing existing literature can provide evidence that the proposed research is essential and can shape and define the proposed research to meet the existing needs of the area of study. It provides the researcher with an idea of the knowledge that has been uncovered and what questions have been left unanswered.

For the purposes of this study, I will show the need for a preparation program for assistant principals to make their first year as principals more successful. I will also show that such a program is not currently practiced widely. To accomplish this task, the review of related literature is divided into three sections: the assistant principalship, the principalship, and developing the assistant principalship into a training ground for the principalship. Much of the information cited is not recent. As the assistant principalship evolved into a position in most schools, researchers often focused attention on many facets of the assistant principalship. With the exception of a few researchers such as Daresh, focus has drifted away from the job of the assistant principal to topics such as the preparation of the assistant principal and the mentoring of new principals. There is very little current research on the assistant principalship.

In addition to reviewing literature, I will discuss my pilot study in this section. In the pilot study, I interviewed three principals, who had the least amount of experience as principals in my school district. I asked them questions similar to those I planned to ask the study participants in an effort to determine if the questions were effective in generating the information I needed and to gather preliminary data.

## The Assistant Principalship

### *Introduction*

The first section of the literature review focuses on the assistant principalship. I will first deal with background information - the knowledge and experience brought to the position by individuals from Master of School Administration programs and the motivation of individuals to enter the position. I will then turn the focus to the job of the assistant principal - noting job descriptions, how they compare to the actual duties of assistant principals, possible causes for discrepancies between the two and the reactions of assistant principals with respect to their jobs.

### *Prior Experiences for Assistant Principals in North Carolina*

All school administrators bring various experiences to their job - teaching, coaching, participation in community and church activities, and family experiences, to name a few. Since Master of School Administration programs must address a specified *core* of information to be certified by the state of North Carolina, all certified assistant principals bring a certain amount of *required* knowledge to the position. However, their actual course work and graduate school experiences can vary. For a better understanding, I examined the Master of School Administration programs at four universities that serve North Carolina's southeastern communities: East Carolina University, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina State University and The University of North Carolina at Wilmington. All of the programs include administrative internships and require a minimum of 42 hours of graduate study. I chose these four schools because they serve the students in the area of the state in which I am most familiar, professionally and personally. Analyzing the courses and

internships in each graduate program will provide a “picture” of the knowledge and skills graduates of the Master of School Administration programs have been exposed to and the differences in the programs. (See Appendix A for a detailed analysis.)

General categories of study in Master of School Administration programs exist, including instructional leadership, managerial leadership, law and policies, and societal awareness. There are differences in the four programs examined including the absence of law and finance at The University of North Carolina at Wilmington and the focus of curriculum and instruction supervision at North Carolina State University. Even courses which appear to be similar, such as East Carolina University’s *Ethical and Societal Aspects of Leadership* and North Carolina State University’s *Ethics for School Decision Making*, can have very different outcomes due to the philosophies of professors, textbooks and supplemental materials used, and other factors.

Administrative internships are full of variation as well since, like assistant principalships, they are greatly determined by the host principal. Host principals are informed either through a general statement, at East Carolina University, or a detailed plan of work, at North Carolina State University, that students are expected to be exposed to all aspects of the assistant principalship/principalship. Products associated with the internship range from The University of North Carolina at Wilmington’s organizational analysis and Fayetteville State University’s inquiry project and local school district study to North Carolina State University’s portfolio.

#### *Motivation to Enter the Field*

Completing a graduate program shows that assistant principals bring more than knowledge to their positions, they also bring a certain amount of ambition - ambition to take

courses, to leave the classroom, and to begin a new job. When asked why they wanted to enter the field of school administrations, 400 assistant principals in a Gorton and Kattman (1985) study noted the need for more responsibility. Specifically, they wanted to be involved in orienting new teachers, planning in-service programs, conducting student orientations, developing school calendars, developing curricula, selecting textbooks, deciding school policy and assisting with public relations. The participants also noted less specific goals of helping others, using abilities and aptitudes, working with people, exerting leadership and having an opportunity to be creative and original. Others view the assistant principalship as “a step up the career ladder” since almost half of those in the position advance to “other professional posts” (Marshall, 1992, p.9).

### *The Job Description*

What are assistant principals expected to do? The Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (1980) developed the following thirteen elements of the assistant principal’s job description:

- administer student discipline
- supervise attendance procedures
- participate in program development
- observe and evaluate teachers
- monitor supervision of student activities
- manage the school office and supervise non-professional personnel
- supervise preparation of monthly attendance reports

- provide supervision of the school building
- attend co-curricular activities
- supervise the accounting control system
- manage activities of two faculty support groups
- public relations (advisory board, boosters, etc.)
- complete other duties assigned by the principal (pp.5-6).

A guide for posting an assistant principal's position provides another example of a job description:

*Primary Function:* To serve as the professional assistant leader in the implementation of the philosophy and policies of the school system. This function shall be under the direction of the regional superintendent and the building principal.

*Major Responsibilities:* (1) supervising student behavior; (2) handling specific assigned duties related to school management; (3) continuing professional development; (4) working cooperatively with professional staff; (5) providing leadership in the instructional program.

*Illustration of Key Duties:* (1) Supervising student behavior: supervising student behavior in building and on grounds; conferring with parents regarding their students' problems; dealing with individual student discipline problems; counseling students; consulting with guidance counselors; acting as liaison with community agencies, such as the police department, in connection with student problems. (2) Handling specific assigned duties related to school management: helping to arrange and organize a school schedule; initiating some flexible scheduling; helping with attendance;

working on budget problems. (3) Continuing professional development: reading professional literature. (4) Working cooperatively with professional staff: assisting new teachers in the system. (5) Providing leadership in the instructional program: arranging and taking part in faculty meetings; attending professional meetings; planning and working with teachers; visiting classrooms to supervise teachers; demonstrating specific ways of improving instruction. (Black, 1980, p.38)

Though the job descriptions included are over twenty years old, comparing them to more recent ones shows that the expectations of school systems have seemingly changed very little. The job description gives the prospective employee an idea of the expectations of the employer, and the instrument by which the employee is evaluated provides additional insight. The following function areas are those by which all assistant principals in Duplin County, North Carolina, are evaluated:

A. Pre-Class Organization

1. Helps implement student orientation and registration programs.

B. Planning the School Program

1. Assists in the development of goals and objectives for the school.
2. Provides direction to staff in establishing instructional goals and objectives.
3. Contributes to the planning of the instructional program.

C. Implementing the School Program

1. Provides direction to staff in implementing instructional goals and objectives.
2. Interacts with staff members to assist in their development.
3. Conducts staff meeting to keep members informed.

D. Evaluating and Remediating the School Program

1. Assists in the evaluation of the instructional program.
  2. Assists in the evaluation process for staff members.
  3. Initiates improvements in needed areas.
- E. Involving the Staff in Budget Allocations
1. Involves the staff in setting priorities concerning expenditures for supplies.
- F. Keeping Professionally Competent
1. Upgrades own professional knowledge and skills (Through reading, workshops, training sessions, conferences, courses, etc.).
- G. Coordinating Budgets and Schedules
1. Assists in the preparation and management of school budgets.
  2. Assists in the development and coordination of school schedules.
  3. Assists in the implementation and coordination of the school's co-curricular program.
- H. Handling Disciplinary Procedures
1. Defines and disseminates information pertaining to classification, promotion, retention, suspension, and expulsion policies, procedures and criteria.
  2. Implements clearly-defined disciplinary procedures that have been communicated to parents, students, staff and community.
- I. Coordinating and Communication the School's Formal Structure
1. Communicates and carries out the policies established by the school, local board of education, State Board of Education, N.C. School Law and federal law as it relates to schools.

2. Delegates responsibility as authorized, and accepts the responsibility for the completion of the assigned tasks.
3. Communicates the school program, goals and objectives, and policies of the community.

J. Coordinating School Services and Resources

1. Assists in supervising and maintaining auxiliary services (i.e. transportation, cafeteria, maintenance, custodial).
2. Uses community resources to supplement the school program.

K. Facilitating Organizational Efficiency

1. Promotes and maintains open communications among staff members.
2. Promotes and maintains a positive student attitude.

By comparing the job descriptions and evaluation instrument to the course of study in Master of School Administration programs, it appears that assistant principals have been given an opportunity to acquire the knowledge needed in the course of study and have been given an opportunity to apply their knowledge in the internship. Based on these assumptions, the assistant principalship should be an ideal opportunity to practice being a principal while having assistance and supervision from the principal.

*The Job*

Assistant principal job descriptions and evaluation instruments depict a comprehensive administrative position. It is important, however, to understand the real tasks completed by assistant principals. There were function areas on my evaluation as an assistant principal in my first year that I neither experienced nor was I given an opportunity

to experience in my day-to-day activities. The following information discusses this discrepancy.

A study by Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelly & McLeary (1988) asked assistant principals to rate duties for their level of discretionary behavior. The top ten duties included: student discipline, evaluation of teachers, student attendance, school policies, special arrangements, school master schedules, emergency arrangements, instructional methods, school related building use and orientation programs for new students. These duties do not address the themes of Master of School Administration courses such as instructional and visionary leadership. Another study (Kelly, 1987) noted that the duties of the secondary assistant principal include student programming, discipline, attendance, alternative education program, locks, lockers, cocurricular programs, student council, building supervision and maintenance, textbook rentals, parking, fire drills, school pictures, graduation, public address announcements, awards, supplies, support staff, exam schedules, junior high promotion decisions and report cards.

It is obvious that these assistant principals “spend most of their time at tasks they would not look after as principals and little time on duties they would be responsible for as principals” (Kelly, 1987, p.16). Specifically, a 1980 study by Black states that middle school assistant principals spend 85% of their time on discipline and 15% on buses, parent conferences and completion of reports (p.36). Marshall (1992) adds that “assistants are seldom expected to assert leadership by creating new projects or inspired initiatives” (p.6).

#### *Assistant Principal Reactions to the Job*

There appears to be a discrepancy between what assistant principals were educated and trained to do in Master of School Administration programs and what they actually do in

their positions. This discrepancy often creates a loss of job satisfaction as assistant principals feel that “too much time is spent on *trivia* and desk detail which could be dealt with effectively by a less qualified, less important member of the school community” (Austin, 1972, p.70). Such *trivia* explains why “it is possible for the ordinary assistant principal to go for weeks, even months, buried deep in custodial, clerical, discipline and social duties, to the total exclusion of meaningful interaction with teachers and students in the classroom setting” (Panyako & Rorie, 1987, p.8).

The tasks performed by assistant principals bring both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Specifically, assistant principals get satisfaction from their work in evaluating and supervising teachers, working with teachers to improve and modify instructional plans and student counseling. (Garawski, 1978; Black, 1980). One assistant principal commented, “there have been times - like when I found a way to help teachers launch a neat project, like watching our team get to the finals in the debate competition - when I feel happy” (Marshall, 1992, p.1).

Likewise, dissatisfaction comes from many aspects of the assistant principalship, including the tasks of scheduling, cafeteria and hall duties, discipline and clerical duties (Black, 1980). Other dissatisfactions, not specifically related to tasks, provide evidence that the assistant principalship is not a training ground for the principalship. These include poor definition of responsibilities, few opportunities for on-the-job professional growth, lack of feedback from supervisors, lack of involvement in decision making, lack of assistance from immediate supervisors, being ignored by superiors, being perceived as only disciplinarians and having work credited to superiors (Gorton & Kattman, 1985, Garawski, 1978).

### *Cause of Discrepancies - Leadership Theory*

The discrepancies among the education and training provided in Master of School Administration programs, the job description of the assistant principal and the actual job of the assistant principal can be credited to many sources. One source is the principal. “The assistant’s position should be the primary training ground for the principalship, and the principal should assume the responsibility to thoroughly prepare the assistant principal for the position” (Fulton, 1987, p.52); however, assistant principalships are as varied as the principals who serve as supervisors for them. If assistant principals are “principals in training” why do some principals allow such differences to exist between their job and that of the assistant principal?

A simplified answer to the complex question can be found in leadership theories and leadership styles. Principals operate based on their chosen leadership theory or leadership style. Their actions may be conscious and thought out or subconscious. There are three categories of leadership theories - trait theories, behavioral theories and contingency theories. A description of these will provide a “picture” of various types of personalities assistant principals are exposed to and how their professional experiences are affected as a result.

#### *Trait Theories*

The most popular trait approach is McGregor’s Theories X and Y. Brunel University’s Business Open Learning Archive (2002) states that theory X is the traditional style of management, implemented in a top-down fashion as the principal believes that the assistant principal must be constantly supervised and coerced to be productive. A Theory X principal constantly monitors the assistant principal and does not allow her to assume major responsibilities for herself. The Theory Y management style characterized by a sensitivity to

human needs, valuing the views of the assistant principal and the belief that she would be productive even without close supervision. A Theory Y principal strives to work as a team with the assistant principal, providing her with opportunities to complete valued assignments on her own.

### *Behavioral Theories*

#### *Participatory leadership*

According to Vasu, Stewart and Garson (1998), the continuum of participatory leadership has at one end, authoritarian leadership; at the other end, laissez-faire leadership; in the middle, democratic leadership. In the authoritarian climate, the principal makes all the decisions and allows the assistant principal to see only one step at a time. He keeps total control in his office, allowing the assistant principal to do minor tasks for projects, one at a time, and putting the information together to complete the task himself. The laissez-faire principal acts as a passive resource for the assistant principal, letting the assistant principal and others be totally involved in all aspects of the school and simply gives a nod of the head to their work. The most successful participatory leadership behavior is the democratic theory, where the principal bases his actions on the discussions and decisions of the group. One example is utilizing the School Improvement Team, comprised of members of the faculty, staff, administration and parents, when decisions must be made and striving to work cohesively with the assistant principal and other members of the leadership team.

#### *Instrumental leadership*

The final major behavioral approach is instrumental leadership which includes path-goal theories and behavior modification theories (Vasu et al., 1998). Both of these theories emphasize leadership behavior as a source of satisfaction needed by the assistant principal

and both employ leadership based on the situation. In behavior modification, an effort is placed on changing concrete and specific behaviors. In path-goal theory the principal lets the assistant principal know which “path” to follow to achieve the goal then works to eliminate barriers so the assistant principal can be successful. Again, the specific behaviors of the principal are based on the situation. Directive principals guide assistant principals facing difficult tasks. Participative principals give direction to assistant principals who are aggressive in their career. Supportive principals reduce stress for assistant principals in dissatisfying tasks. Achievement-oriented principals encourage goal-attainment for assistant principals in tasks where opportunities for achievement are greatest. With such a variety of leadership styles to implement, assistant principals are likely to get very different experiences depending on the principal’s choice and implementation of style.

### *Contingency Theories*

#### *Transformational and transactional leadership*

Another category of approaches to leadership is based on contingency (or situational) theories, including transformational and transactional styles (Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Vasu et al., 1998). Transactional principals guide or motivate assistant principals in the direction of established goals by clarifying roles and task requirements. Transformational principals rely on the *synergy* between principal and assistant principal to motivate assistant principals to do more than is expected because the principal focuses on the intrinsic needs of the assistant principal. The transactional principal rewards accomplishments of assistant principals that promote the goals of the organization while the transformational principals see that assistant principals understand the importance of their tasks then instills pride in them so they strive to complete tasks for the good of the organization. Assistant principals can learn

from principals who practice either transactional or transformational leadership, depending upon the leadership style of the assistant principal.

### *Situational leadership*

Hershey and Blanchard's contingency model of situational leadership is based on both task and relationship behaviors.

Task behavior is essentially the extent to which a leader engages in one way communication by explaining what each staff member is to do as well as when, where and how tasks are to be accomplished. Relationship behavior, even when we call it supportive behavior, is the extent to which a leader engages in two way communication by providing socioemotional support, *psychological strokes*, and facilitating behaviors (Hersey & Blanchard, 1979, p.189).

Based on the ability and willingness of assistant principals, principals may have to tell assistant principals what to do, sell them on an idea, allow them to be involved in the decision making, or delegate responsibility or tasks to the assistant principals.

### *Conclusion*

The tasks and responsibilities of assistant principals are assigned by the principals with whom they work. Assistant principals who work for principals practicing McGregor's Theory X will have different experiences than those who work for Theory Y principals. Those who work with principals implementing behavioral theories will have different experiences than those who work with principals who implement contingency theories. Principals who understand and employ situational leadership may provide their assistant principals with a proper amount of responsibility and experience. Those who work with principals who are less experienced or less aware of situations and the leadership style they

implement in certain situations may not get the training needed to be successful principals. Therefore, some type of experience that is consistent, with respect to tasks, needs to be provided for assistant principals.

### *Summary*

Based on my analysis of four Master of School Administration programs in North Carolina, assistant principals have been educated in the areas of instructional leadership, managerial leadership, organizational and leadership theories, law and policies of education. By examining job descriptions and evaluation instruments, the assistant principalship is evidently designed to be a *practice* principalship. However, in my experience I have found that many assistant principals find that their job is simply one comprised of tasks that the principal does not want to, or does not find important enough, to handle. For example, though items such as budgeting are on the assistant principal's evaluation instrument, some never get experience with the financial matters of the school.

Such situations cause some assistant principals to find dissatisfaction in their work, feeling as though they are being *slighted* in their preparation for the principalship while others see their position as valuable training. One explanation for the variety of experiences in the assistant principalship may be the principal and the leadership theories employed. Future administrators must not only "be given a firm knowledge base of leadership, [and] exposure to effective leadership," they must also be provided with "ample opportunities to develop leadership abilities" (Vonberg and Davis, 1997, p.19). Therefore, some form of a centralized program may provide assistant principals with the training they need to be more confident and successful in their first year of the principalship.

## The Principalship

### *Introduction*

The previous section noted that some assistant principals feel as though they are not being given an opportunity to apply the knowledge and experiences that they received in Master of School Administration programs. As a result, they feel they are not being well trained for the principalship. However, assistant principals are not yet principals and can not extrapolate as to their experiences as a first-year principal. Therefore, this section will focus on the principalship and the perceptions of principals as to their readiness for the position. I will summarize findings of both previous research and the pilot study.

### *Previous Research*

The course work and internship involved in receiving a principal's certificate insures that administrators have been exposed to certain information and training. Obtainment of the certificate does not promise that as assistant principals, administrators will have an opportunity to practice the skills they acquired. In fact, research lends evidence to the contrary.

In addition to the challenges of becoming familiar with a new role and a new school, first-year principals feel less prepared for school finance, business management and school facility management than other areas (Lyons, 1993). New principals also discuss the need for more practical information on current issues, conflict management, human relationship, time management and budget training as well as a need for more knowledge pertaining to negotiation issues and the politics of education (Schmieder, McGrevin & Townley, 1994). Major issues from a study by Daresh (1986) include a need for more technical expertise (school system's forms, computer systems, and budgeting systems of the district), as well as

more feedback and support from superiors and subordinates. In addition to these issues, new principals expressed a need for a mentoring relationship with another administrator that has no supervisory authority and guidance for dealing with outside groups, unsatisfactory personnel, lack of space and unforeseen teacher turnover (Spradling, 1989).

Most school employees, especially teachers, also have opinions regarding the needs of new principals. Giannangelo & Malone (1987) found that teachers believe principals are responsible for too many clerical responsibilities, need more training in the current curricula and current trends in education, and need more information relating to teaching techniques and methodologies. Superintendents add that new principals need additional development in areas of encouraging and managing parental involvement, dealing with a large variety of people, developing a solid communication network and building trust with the faculty to develop an effective team (Schmieder et al., 1994).

### *Summary*

Previous research and the pilot study for the proposed research provide evidence that the thoughts of new principals are consistent with those of assistant principals - the assistant principalship is not providing a proper training ground for the principalship. This statement is supported by comments made by teachers, superintendents and the principals themselves with respect to the challenges faced and areas of their leadership which lack development.

### Developing the Assistant Principalship into a Training Ground

#### *Introduction*

“Assistant principals should be prepared to assume responsibilities that are delegated by the principal. The principal should, in turn, allow the assistant principal the opportunity and authority to fulfill the responsibilities and become an innovator and initiator” (The

Assistant Principal's Commission, 1980). Such opportunities can only be afforded by principals. Research illuminates the fact that, due to differing leadership styles of principals, assistant principals are not always given the opportunity to exert their own leadership and assume responsibilities which will develop their leadership abilities. In light of this information, principals and those in other line and staff positions have suggestions for preparing educators to become principals.

#### *Issues to be Addressed*

The following list of issues to be addressed was compiled from information included in many studies, (Lyons, 1993; Efdelson, 2000; Schmieder et. al, 1994; Pellicer & Buford, 1982; Elsberry & Bishop, 1996). The items listed are those to which administrators felt more attention should be given when preparing educators to be principals.

- Finance and business
- A comprehensive orientation program - Developed by the superintendent's office using experience principals as a resource by assigning mentors and having monthly sessions to share experiences
- Shared decision making
- Evaluating staff, assessing the strengths and weaknesses and using the information to choose or create appropriate staff development activities to strengthen weaknesses; individual improvement plans
- Locating and securing resources
- Negotiating district policies

- An introduction to the school system - knowing who to call for what, getting to know the administration of the school system, training in the forms, reports and computer programs used
- Collegial observation and reflective feedback; collegial support groups
- A superintendent defined and monitored role for the assistant principal (so the job experience is not at the whim of the principal)
- An active role in personnel issues at the school level
- Involvement in policy making decisions

### *Summary*

Without a structured plan for the assistant principalship, “The assistant principal position is most susceptible to the dangers of professional stagnation, with the constant tendency to be drawn into traditional work details” (Panyako & Rorie, 1987, p.7). Because many different educational philosophies and leadership styles exist, a plan should be developed and implemented by the superintendent’s office, providing assistant principals with the necessary leadership experiences. Such a plan should provide that a certain level of consistency exists in their leadership opportunities provided to assistant principals and better prepare them.

### *Pilot Study*

#### *Background*

To conduct the study, I interviewed three of the least experienced principals in my school system. Each participant was in the third year of his or her tenure as a principal. The first participant has been a middle school principal for the past two years after serving as a

high school principal for one year. She is a forty-six year old black female who served as a high school business teacher for ten years and a high school assistant principal for 2 years. The second participant has been an elementary principal at the same school for the past three years. He is a thirty-five year old white male who served as a middle and high school art teacher for six and one-half years and as an assistant principal at both elementary and middle schools for two and one-half years. The third participant is a fifty-three year old white male who has been an elementary principal at the same school for three years. He served as an elementary physical education teacher for 8 years, a part-time elementary assistant principal and part-time teacher for four years and a full time elementary assistant principal for four years.

The questions asked were designed to gain an understanding of the experiences of each with respect to his/her assistant principalship and principalship. The following eight questions were asked to each participant.

1. What amount of responsibility was given to you as an assistant principal? What types of tasks? (Literature has provided evidence that a discrepancy exists between job descriptions and actual duties of the assistant principalship. Since the job description varies, it is important to understand what this participant's duties entailed.)
2. What was the work relationship like between you and your principal(s)? (A hostile relationship may explain an assistant principal's responsibility for undesirable tasks or little exposure to the principalship.)
3. If there was anything about your experience as an assistant principal that you could change, what would it be? (This information can give the researcher insight as to the

- participants' personal feelings about his/her assistant principalship, shedding light on other answers given.)
4. What are some of the things you are responsible for as a principal that you had little responsibility for or practice in dealing with as an assistant principal? (The researcher needs to know which tasks principals felt unprepared to assume in order to incorporate these ideas into assistant principals' professional development.)
  5. Where did you get help? (There is a need to determine where new principals felt comfortable turning for assistance to utilize this source for assistant principals as well.)
  6. Knowing what you know now, if you were an assistant principal again and knew you wanted to be a principal, what would you be doing to prepare yourself? (This question will generate a list that will become part of the recommendations made to better prepare assistant principals to be principals.)
  7. In reading articles, I found one that addressed the things every new principal needs to know. Do you have anything to add to the list? (These responses will be incorporated into the recommendations made to better prepare assistant principals to be principals.)
  8. What do you do to insure that your assistant principal gets the experience she needs to be a successful principal? (Responses will allow the researcher to see the principal's commitment to preparing assistant principals for the principalship and if so, to see if their practice matches their answers to previous questions.)

## *Findings*

The principals interviewed were assigned many similar tasks as assistant principals including discipline, transportation, textbooks, lunchroom duty and involvement with various committees. They felt as though they were given an ample amount of responsibility but not necessarily in the areas in which they needed exposure. They commented that if given the opportunity to be an assistant principal again, they would work harder to learn more, especially with respect to areas that were “glossed over” in graduate school, such as budgeting. They would also deal more with parents instead of directing them to the principal and would strive to be honest, even when the situation was difficult or personal in nature.

When asked about their amount of involvement in the administration of the school, responses varied. One principal commented that he was allowed to be as involved as he wanted to but was not pushed by the principal to take charge or take on extra responsibilities. Another noted that she was given full reign of the school quite often as her principal was frequently absent. He instructed her to do what she thought needed to be done and if it was wrong, they would “fix it” later. A third said that he was not as involved as he would have liked to have been and that the principal very rarely came to him for comments and/or suggestions. It appears that the principal’s leadership style directly affected the assistant principals’ job experiences and the amount of exposure to leadership opportunities each was given.

As new principals, the participants faced new challenges including making the final decision on school issues and not being able to say, “I’ll ask the principal.” They also noted being solely responsible for the school budgeting as well as hiring and firing of personnel as issues not faced in the assistant principalship. They turned to various sources to get

assistance in dealing with these issues. Groups such as teachers, custodians, bookkeepers and school leadership teams were mentioned as being utilized. All of those interviewed mentioned relying on other principals as well as the superintendent and his staff for help and advice.

The principals prepare their assistant principals for the principalship in various ways. Strategies include discussing almost all decisions and their related tasks with assistant principals, doing tasks, such as scheduling, together, being supportive of the assistant principal's decisions, giving assistant principals leadership roles such as chairing committees and allowing the assistant principal to take charge of certain things without interference from the principal. The advice they give to their assistant principals and others as they become principals is: develop a team culture, realizing and recognizing the contributions of each member of the staff; be yourself with people – value them, their beliefs and decisions; and, know the law when dealing with teachers, parents and students.

#### *Recommendations and Implementation*

Information compiled from both the pilot study interviews and readings yielded many suggestions. The first is the need for an introduction to the school system. When an assistant principal is hired, the school system should provide an orientation, an introduction to the school system. The new hires should be introduced to the administrators and staff of the central office and told whom to contact for different needs. The orientation should also include an introduction to system-wide forms, reports and computer programs. During this introductory period, the assistant principal should be paired with a veteran principal. The principal should serve as a mentor and could be from a different grade level to expand the assistant principal's experience.

Literature and pilot study participants suggest that assistant principals should meet with their mentors monthly. They should also meet monthly as a group, with facilitation provided by the superintendent or his designee. Monthly meetings should cover topics such as district policies and changes to those policies, location and securing resources, staff development, shared decision making, personal and professional growth, finance and budgeting, the business aspects of managing a school, school law, and personnel, including hiring, firing and evaluating staff. Assistant principals should be encouraged to and provided opportunities to share experiences and provide collegial support. Principals should be included in such opportunities from time to time, so assistant principals can hear about their experiences as well.

Meeting to discuss issues or to participate in short activities should be supplemented with more in-depth tasks. Therefore, assistant principals should be provided with *assignments*, either real or in mock form. Such assignments could include interviewing a prospective employee, evaluating staff, preparing a budget, attending meetings of county-wide groups such as curriculum advisory boards or finance committees. The superintendent or his designee should be responsible for overseeing such assignments to make sure that consistency exists in the implementation of the assignments and to provide feedback to the assistant principals. Regular feedback should also be provided from the principals with whom they work and the principals who serve as their mentors.

The recommendations as implemented, can serve many purposes. Throughout the process, assistant principals can use the materials to develop a professional portfolio. They can also reflect upon what they have experienced to grow personally and professionally. Finally, assistant principal can make notebooks or folders for themselves that they can use as

resources when faced with similar tasks in the principalship. Having such experiences and resources may better prepare assistant principals for the principalship and may prove helpful in making the first year of the principalship less intimidating and frustrating.

Based on the literature, the key to successful implementation of a program to prepare assistant principals to become principals is the superintendent and his staff. Because principals having different leadership styles, suggestions made to principals for involving assistant principals may or may not be implemented. The program must be monitored at a school system level, by the superintendent or his designee. These leaders should develop the assignments, evaluate them and provide feedback. They should also develop the job description for the assistant principalship and monitor principals to see that assistant principals are being given opportunities as noted in the job description.

#### Summary

The purpose of reviewing existing literature was to provide evidence that the proposed research was essential. The information shared in this section showed that additional study in the area of utilizing the assistant principalship as a training ground for the principalship was needed for three reasons. First, assistant principals come to the position with varied professional histories and experiences (years of service, positions held, graduate programs). Second, the job descriptions and evaluation instrument objectives for assistant principalships often vary greatly from the actual tasks and duties carried out by the administrator due to the leadership theories and styles adopted by the principal. Finally, research shows that new principals do not feel adequately prepared to handle all the facets of their position.

Though a great amount of research focuses on the preparation of administrators with respect to university programs and support and help for new principals (Lyons, 1992; Pellicer & Buford, 1982; Vonberg & Davis, 1997; Andrews, 1989; Melvin, 1977; Efdelson 2000; Kelly, 1993; Schmeider et. at, 1994), little research exists that focuses on the development of the assistant principal. It is believed that little attention is given to the idea in schools, too, as many assistant principals who have been in the position for a number of years lose their leadership skills because they are not utilized (Golanda, 1991). Study in the area of utilizing the assistant principalship as a training ground for the principalship could lead to the avoidance of such a waste of potential.

Taking the opportunity to speak with new principals about their initial perceptions of the principalship provided a wealth of information. Such information included a thorough description of the tasks for which they felt prepared and unprepared, what strategies they currently implement to develop the leadership in their assistant principals and their ideas for the implementation of a professional development program for assistant principals. This information was used to make recommendations that can be implemented by the superintendent's office to provide proper, consistent leadership development for assistant principals.

The pilot study provided preliminary data as well as information needed to add, remove and edit questions for interviews, the means by which data for the research were gathered. The following chapter describes interviewing, and other elements of the methodology of the research.

## METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the individual aspects of the research – the theoretical framework and how it was developed, the elements of subjectivity, ethicality and validity and how each was addressed, the sample and how it was chosen, and the data and how they were collected and analyzed.

### Theoretical Framework

It is the job of universities' Master of School Administration programs to prepare school administrators through graduate courses in budgeting and finance, school law, program evaluation, and other topics. Master of School Administration programs also include either a part-time or full-time internship so candidates can get hands-on training in the administrative offices of schools. In North Carolina, students who desire to be certified administrators must pass a licensure exam in addition to completing their graduate program. As these educators become assistant principals, many learn how to complete the tasks given to them by their principals. They devise ways to accurately document which buses students ride, the number and title of textbooks in each classroom, and which students were disciplined on a certain day. They also learn by experience how to deal with teachers, students, parents and other colleagues in the school district. Like teaching, the first year can be difficult but with time, the tasks usually become more routine.

In my experience with school administration, I have heard new principals use many adjectives to describe their new position, including challenging and overwhelming. I have not heard the word *comfortable* used to describe the first year of the principalship. Since the first year of a principalship often determines the success or failure of a principal, I want to be

sure that I am ready to be a principal. It is my hope that the recommendations, when implemented, which resulted from my research, will provide assistant principals with such *comfortableness* when entering the principalship. As I enter this endeavor, I based my theoretical framework on the foundation of constructivism upon which I build three premises. First, Master of School Administration programs differ at various universities, so assistant principals possess varied amounts and types of knowledge. Second, the experiences of assistant principalships are largely dependent upon the principals for whom they work so they have had various experiences and have acquired various skills. Finally, skills are acquired by *doing* rather than *watching*, so opportunities to develop skills should be afforded to assistant principals.

The notion of *doing* to learn is rooted in constructivist learning theory, the major theoretical framework for my research. I explored the needs of the assistant principal from the perspective that “humans can only clearly understand what they have themselves constructed” (Southwest Educational Development Library, n.d., p.1). This is applicable to the tasks assistant principals should address to better prepare themselves to be principal because “knowledge and ideas emerged only from a situation in which learners had to draw them out of experiences that had meaning and importance to them” (Southwest Educational Development Library, n.d., p.1). The fact that “Understanding is built up step by step through active involvement” serves as the *lens* through which I explored the assistant principals’ development in preparing for the principalship, addressing their Master of School Administration programs and their experiences in working with principals (Southwest Educational Development Library, n.d., p.1).

Though all certified administrators in North Carolina have completed graduate programs, Master of School Administration degree programs vary in content and the courses required of students. For example, programs at The University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) focus on the administrator as a well-rounded person with courses such as *Interdisciplinary Humanities Seminar*, while lacking courses in finance and law. Fayetteville State University (FSU) approaches the education of administrators holistically through courses such as *Leadership in Educational Organizations, Trends and Issues: Resource Management/Society and the Schools*. Both North Carolina State University (NCSU) and East Carolina University (ECU) have courses that target the ethics of leadership but UNCW and FSU do not have such courses. NCSU is the only campus examined that provides *Context and Challenges of School Improvement*, a class which deals specifically with school improvement but does not have a separate class for school law. ECU has a two-course sequence in Learning-Centered Leadership that no other campus examined requires. It is obvious that Master of School Administration programs provide students with varied courses and experiences; therefore, school administrators come to the job with different bases of knowledge.

Just as administrative preparation programs differ, administrative experiences vary widely as well. I believe that one responsibility of the principal is to share information and experiences with the assistant principals; however, I can not assume that this takes place. Some principals and assistant principals do not operate as a team as each has his own office, his own tasks and his own job - there is no intermingling of the two positions. Other assistant principals work with principals that share information as it becomes available to them, that give assistant principals significant tasks which will develop their administrative

skills and that serve as mentors to their assistant principals. Assistant principalships are as varied as the personalities, leadership styles and experiences of the principals with whom the assistant principals work.

Principals who do not allow their assistant principals to *do* leadership are committing a grave disservice to the future educators. Golanda (1991) illustrates this situation with an example.

Certainly it would not be reasonable to advocate a preparation program for a skilled craftsman, such as a carpenter, to consist secondarily of watching a master carpenter (let alone an average or poor craftsman!) while assigning as the primary responsibility of these apprentices (for which they would actually be paid), mundane duties the likes of which a master carpenter would never normally perform; e.g., carrying lumber to the construction location, performing all the clean-up required on the job site, and insuring the safekeeping of every carpenters' tools. It is doubly doubtful that any contractor knowledgeable of these practices would ever employ a person thus trained to perform for them as a master carpenter (p.275).

Golanda (1991) states that this often occurs in public schools with respect to assistant principals and insists that assistant principals must be given a chance to *do* leadership in order to *learn* leadership and acquire leadership skills.

In summary, I began my research operating within the framework, rooted in constructivism, that that all Master of School Administration programs and assistant principalships are not the same and that skills are acquired by *doing* rather than *watching*. These assumptions were the foundation upon which I built my argument that recommendations are needed to better prepare assistant principals for the principalship.

## Subjectivity

Subjectivity often has negative connotations with respect to research and it is considered something to avoid but as Behar (1993) states, “we cross borders, but we don’t erase them; we take our borders with us” (p.320). I bring certain biases to this research that should be mentioned.

First and most importantly, I feel very strongly that a program is needed to prepare assistant principals to become principals. Conversations with principals and central office administrators have confirmed my idea that many principals struggle through their first year, often feeling inadequate. As a practicing assistant principal, I feel that little has been done at the local level to develop the skills I will need to succeed as a principal, such as budgeting and scheduling. These facts prompt me to recognize the need for recommendations that, when implemented, may develop and nurture the skills of assistant principals.

As an assistant principal, I have my own opinions of experiences that I would like to have and skills that I would like to acquire before entering the principalship - things that I would like to see included in the recommendations. These opinions could have been weaknesses if I had allowed them to distort my interpretation of the data. I had to be especially careful when assessing the information obtained from interviews with new principals as to allow categories to emerge solely from coding.

I tend to agree with Peshkin (1998) that subjectivity and bias can be an asset when it is recognized and monitored. The fact that I am an assistant principal can serve as a strength as I am very knowledgeable and familiar with the terms and experiences described by new principals. Another strength I bring to the research is my relationships with the participants which were interviewed. I know each of these principals personally, having had graduate

courses with some, working in the same school system with others and living in the same city as others. I have talked with all of them informally over the past few years and we have developed an open, trusting rapport. I believe established relationships allowed me to obtain richer information for the research.

### Sampling Procedure

Purposeful sampling was used so the information obtained is as rich as possible (Glesne, 1999). The sampling was criterion based as all participants were administrators who were assistant principals and have now completed their first or second year in the principalship. The sampling was also a cross-section as it was only interested in one point in the careers of the principals.

The sample was homogeneous in that all of the seven subjects have been assistant principals; therefore, a comprehensive sampling (though limited) was necessary to lead to greater representativeness (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This was accomplished by including a wide range of variation in the people being studied, which was representative of the different subgroups of the population (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). To obtain such a sample, the first and second year principals selected to participate were both male and female of various races including black, white and American Indian. They had training as assistant principals in seven different North Carolina public school systems. They served as assistant principals for varied lengths of time before becoming principals, allowing different skills to be acquired and mastered. Though the study was not particularly focusing on graduate level schooling, it should be noted that the subjects attended various universities including The University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Fayetteville State University and East Carolina University. Three of the participants were North Carolina Principal Fellows – recipients of a

graduate fellowship which awards participants with annual stipends for two years during which they are full-time students, completing a Master of School Administration program which includes a year-long internship in a school as a principal intern.

## Data Collection

### *Interviewing*

An important part of my study was to understand the experiences of new principals and to discover which, if any, aspects of their assistant principalships prepared them to be the leaders of schools. I got a rich picture of such experiences by listening to the new principals tell their stories and asking for clarification or more details when appropriate. The method of data collection that lends itself to listening to the stories of participants is interviewing. An interview is simply, “a method of data collection that may be described as an interaction involving the interviewer and the interviewee, the purpose of which is to obtain valid and reliable information”

(Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p.82).

Interviews, like other methods of data collection, have strengths and weaknesses. Strengths of the interview include the fact that I was able to “guide the revelation of the information” (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993, p.166). The personal interaction enabled me to “better obtain data addressing the questions asked in the study” (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993, p.166). Interviews enabled large amounts of information to be gathered quickly, allowed for a wide variety of information, and provided an opportunity for immediate follow-up questions and clarification. (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Weaknesses of interviews typically include the facts that participants were not willing to share information with me to the degree that was desired or might not have been truthful

(Marshall & Rossman, 1989). The selection of my research participants allowed me to address the issues of interviewees being unwilling to share information in depth and information which was truthful. I have established personal relationships with each of the participants and as fellow educators, we have often discussed the principalship and assistant principalship in the past. The fact that, for many, it was not the first conversation held concerning the issues of my research may have provided them with a sense of comfort. Many of these conversations took place during social time at professional conferences, over meals or in casual conversation; therefore, the interviews were *picking up where we left off*.

Because my relationship with the participants had been established and because I often had conversations with them, I employed in-depth interviewing, “a conversation with a purpose” (Kahn & Cannell, 1957, p.149). I directed the conversation by exploring “a few general topics to help uncover the participant’s meaning perspective,” but I otherwise let the participant respond as he/she saw fit (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p.82). Guiding questions for the interviews are found in Appendix C. In-depth interviewing allowed the participant’s perspective of the principalship and assistant principalship to “unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p.82). This model best fit my research because it would have been difficult to have had structured interviews with people I often have casual conversations with and because it allowed me to obtain richer, more candid data.

### *Triangulation*

One method that can be used to strengthen and add validity to the interviewing technique of data collection is triangulation. Triangulation is “the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p.146) which

“prevents the investigator from accepting too readily the validity of initial impressions” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p.48). Triangulation exists in many forms. It can refer to multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives or, most applicable to my study, multiple kinds of data sources. (Glesne, 1999, p.31).

One data source I used was interviews. Patton (2002) suggests the use of “minimum samples based on expected reasonable coverage” (p.246). I implemented this idea by selecting a group of seven new principals with varied experiences. The participants served as assistant principals in different school systems to ensure that no two were exposed to the same administrators, programs or policies. They graduated from one of three universities and three were North Carolina Principal Fellows. They were different ages, and had varied years of experience both in education and in the assistant principalship. In addition, participants were both male and female, representing Caucasian, African-American and American Indian races.

A second data source I used was document analysis. I examined the Master of School Administration programs at four universities in North Carolina to determine the categories of courses offered and to compare and contrast the programs. Since multiple kinds of data sources are used to “test for consistencies” the purpose of the analysis was to determine the knowledge and skills administrators should possess as they enter the assistant principalship and compare it to the responsibilities of their jobs (Patton, 2002, p.248).

Often, another form of data collection is used to triangulate. I chose not to include another kind of data, such as observations, but simply to utilize triangulation as a means of finding “deeper insight” (Patton, 2002, p.248). I believe that observations would not have provided useful data because I was more interested in the major tasks and duties with which

principals struggle than their day-to-day actions and behaviors. Many of these tasks, such as budgeting, do not occur on a daily basis.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis enabled me to share what I have found with others. To accomplish such a task, I first made sense of the interviews by systematically searching and arranging materials to increase my own understanding (Bogden & Bicklen, 1997). Analyzing the data included breaking it into manageable pieces then searching for patterns and connection among the pieces. The result of the analysis was the discovery of the information that is important, that should be shared and, for the purposes of applied research, that should be incorporated into a plan for action (Bogden & Bicklen, 1997).

The data were first separated into pieces by reading through interview transcripts, notes and memos carefully and line by line. As I read, I began developing a preliminary list of possible coding categories. Codes included categories such as the participant's ways of thinking about people and objects, processes, activities, events, strategies and relationships (Bogden & Bicklen, 1997).

The next steps were to test the codes and assign data to them. In order to analyze the codes and see if they have writing possibilities, an outline for recommendations was developed (Bogden & Bicklen, 1997). After testing the codes, I assigned them to units of data found in my transcripts, memos and notes.

Finally, I searched for relationships among categories by outlining the information I had discovered, using codes as topics and the data related to each code as supporting details and examples. I *told the story* of the data as they relate to the professional development of the assistant principal in his or her preparation to assume the principalship. I also used the

codes and their related data to develop themes. The themes were then used to make recommendations which may enhance the utilization of the assistant principalship as a training ground for the principalship.

### Ethical Issues

The research code of ethics “requires that the researchers be ethical in the purpose as well as in the process of doing research” (Soltis in Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p.255). My research operated on the basic principles that participants would have sufficient information to make informed decisions about participating in a study, that all unnecessary risks were eliminated, that benefits outweighed risks, and that the study would be conducted by a qualified investigator.

In accordance with the principles of the Institutional Review Board of North Carolina State University, a letter was sent to each of my proposed participants (Appendix B). The intent of the letter was to introduce my study, providing the participants with details of the methodology of my study (how I planned to gather and interpret data), and the implications of the study (what I plan to do with the data). The letter noted that all identities would be kept anonymous. The letter provided sufficient information allowing proposed participants to make an informed decision about participating in the study. After letters had ample time to reach the proposed subjects, I made telephone calls to each, providing him or her an opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns.

In an effort to eliminate all unnecessary physical risks to the research subjects, I traveled to their schools to conduct face-to-face interviews. Participants selected where in their schools the interviews were held to maximize their personal and professional comfort

and minimize their emotional risks. To alleviate any professional risks, all names of participants and their schools were anonymous.

As principals, the subjects belong to the educational administrative community that exists to serve children and teachers. This community will directly benefit from the study. The output of study is a program to prepare assistant principals to be successful principals, particularly in the first year. The benefits are two-fold. First, assistant principals involved in the program may be capable of performing a greater number and a greater variety of tasks. As a result, principals, possibly even those who participated in this study, may work with assistant principals who possess more *principal-like* skills and will thus be able to share the principal's workload. Second, when these assistant principals become principals, teachers and students may benefit from working with more capable, self-confident administrators. The skills which the new principal acquired as an assistant principal may allow her to serve the students, faculty, and staff of her new schools more effectively.

To be ethical, research should be conducted by a qualified researcher. I have explored the aspects and ethics of qualitative research by completing courses at the Masters and Doctoral level in qualitative research. I also have experience in research as I have completed and defended a Masters' thesis. My course work as well as my pilot study have given me practice in the techniques and ethics of interviewing.

Soltis (1990) states, "descriptive research in education has as its primary purpose a revealing of the human dimensions of some educational phenomenon" (p.251). For the purposes of my study, the educational phenomenon was the first year of the principalship and the journey of an administrator to this point from graduate school, by way of the assistant

principalship. Soltis (1990) adds that face-to-face involvement is often called for when such phenomena are being examined.

Smith (1990) provides two suggestions for handling interviews ethically. First, all transcripts were coded for anonymity as a means of protecting the privacy of those who participated in the research. Anonymity was achieved by assigning numbers to each participant or by using pseudo-names for each of the participants. Second, informed consent, “telling the people involved [about the project] as clearly and honestly as possible,” was practiced throughout the research (p.272). Informed consent included openly sharing the background of my research with participants before and during the interviews. After the data were gathered and new ideas emerge, informed consent included dialogue with some participants - sharing ideas that emerged from the interviews and getting their feedback. Dialogue not only served me ethically, it helped establish a rapport with participants.

### Validity

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) address validity as it is concerned with accuracy. They assert that establishing validity requires, “(1) determining the extent to which conclusions effectively represent empirical reality and (2) assessing whether constructs devised by researchers represent or measure the categories of human experience that occur” (p.210). Validity needed to be addressed at both stages of the research process, data collection and data analysis and should have been considered even before data collection began. Therefore, I employed purposeful sampling to enhance the validity of the study by choosing sites and persons that maximized opportunities for comparative analysis (1998, Corbin & Strauss).

Compiling Wolcott’s (1990) nine ideas for addressing validity with Creswell’s (1998) eight suggestions, a comprehensive list of techniques which were applied to address validity

emerges. I describe techniques that are applicable to my study and explain how I made use of them to enhance the validity of my work.

The first technique was to listen more than I talked and record what I heard accurately. Wolcott (1990) explains that researchers who talk too much and hear too little “become their own worst enemy by becoming their own best informant” (p.128). Because I am an assistant principal I was knowledgeable about much of the information the participants were sharing. However, I could not assume too much. I asked for clarification even if I thought I had an understanding of the subject being discussed. Another thing I did during interviews was to take notes. I recorded interviews but cassette players do not capture body language and events as they occur. Finally, I recorded information from interviews (transcripts and notes) within one day so I did not have an opportunity to forget details.

Another technique is to seek feedback from a variety of sources. According to Creswell (1998), I enhanced validity through peer reviews and member checks. To engage in peer review, I utilized a classmate who I also engaged in research to become my “devil’s advocate” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This person was instructed to “ask hard questions about methods, meanings and interpretations” and listen to the researcher’s feelings (Creswell, 1998, p.202). To participate in member checks, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314), I provided some participants with conclusions and recommendations “...so they [could] judge the accuracy and credibility of the account,” and provide me with suggestions for changes and improvements (Creswell, 1998, p.203).

A final way to strive for validity was to write accurately. To write accurately, I assessed my writing line-by-line and even word-by-word, examining for coherence and

consistency (1990). This was a focus for me because I wrote sections of the paper over a long period of time, in different locations, using different sources. I needed to be sure that the wording and details of each section were consistent with the others and that when combined to form a chapter, the information was coherent to the reader. As Eisner (1991) states, “We seek a confluence of evidence that breeds interpretations and conclusions” (p.110). I applied the methods listed as I sought to make sure that my recommendations were coherent and rooted in data.

### Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the individual aspects of the research. The theoretical framework upon which it was based was three fold: first, that assistant principals possess various amounts and types of knowledge; second, that the experiences of assistant principalships are largely dependent upon the principals for whom they work; and third, that skills are acquired by doing rather than watching. My subjectivity, as an assistant principal having my own opinions of the needed professional development of assistant principals, was developed into a strength because it allowed me to be familiar with the subjects discussed by participants. Ethicality was addressed by providing participants with information about the study before asking them to participate, providing participants with anonymity and by providing a qualified researcher to conduct the study. The validity of the research was enhanced by using a variety of sources including members checks and peer reviews as well as by using purposeful sampling.

The sample was homogeneous and chosen purposefully – all participants, though of various ages and races, were principals in public schools who had completed one or two years in the principalship and came to the position by way of the assistant principalship.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and were strengthened through the analysis of Master of School Administration programs. Data were analyzed by coding the interview transcripts, then searching for themes. These themes, and their connections, are uncovered in the next chapter.

## FINDINGS

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the study's participants by exploring their educational and professional experiences. I gathered data by interviewing seven North Carolina administrators who have served as principals in the southeastern part of North Carolina for one or two years. Each worked as an assistant principal in a different school system and had different experiences in preparation for the principalship. I interviewed each participant for approximately one hour at his or her school. To minimize interruptions, interviews were held during the summer when the faculty and students were not there. I used in-depth interviewing, asking a few guiding questions and allowing the participants to speak freely. Interview transcripts can be found in Appendix D.

In the following pages, I will share the participants' views about their preparation for school administration, their experiences as assistant principals, and their views on the principalship including responsibilities and sources of assistance. Finally, I will analyze the participants' information about challenges they experienced as new principals. After determining emerging themes, I will look at each topic individually. For each area of concern noted in the interviews, I will share the participants' comments, return to literature for pertinent information about the topic, then describe one activity that would provide practice in the specified area.

### Background Information

This section is designed to introduce the participants through a brief description of their professional histories, describing their journey to the principalship.

Participant #1 taught for two years as a middle school math teacher and then taught for four years in grades two through five. After taking a two-year leave of absence to complete a Master of School Administration program as a Principal Fellow, she served for one year at a middle school as a half-time assistant principal, half-time Academically and Intellectually Gifted resource teacher, then came to her current school (grades three through five) as the assistant principal. One year later, she was named principal there and has finished her first year in that position.

Participant #2 is beginning her twelfth year in education, holding a degree in special education with behavioral and emotional disabled certification. She taught for seven years in various pre-kindergarten through second grade exceptional children's settings including Educable Mentally Disabled, Behavioral Emotional Disabled and cross-categorical. During her seventh year in education, she applied for the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program and found out she had been accepted into the program at the beginning of her eighth year. Upon graduation, she was hired as an assistant principal at a year round elementary school. In October of her second year as an assistant principal, she returned to her home county to be the principal of an elementary school. She just finished her second year in this principalship.

Participant #3 was a bus driver for a year and a teacher assistant for two and one-half years while completing her college degree. She then taught for seven years – kindergarten for three years and first grade for four years. During that time she went to graduate school and got a Master's of Education with a concentration in reading. At the end of her seventh year she took a leave of absence to obtain a Master of School Administration as a Principal Fellow. When she graduated, she became the assistant principal at a middle school. Two years later, she was named as the principal there and has completed her first year.

Participant #4 taught for eighteen years in a regular classroom. She taught fourth and fifth grade, was a reading specialist and taught high school students in summer programs. She never had experience with the age group of children at her current school, pre-kindergarten through second grade, except in teaching Sunday school at church. She was an assistant principal for nine years, five years at a middle school and four years at her current school. She has been the principal there for one year.

Participant #5 has been in education for twenty-six years. She taught English for thirteen years at the high school level. For the next three years, she served as a high school assistant principal while she completed her curriculum and instruction certification. She was then offered the opportunity to go to the western part of the state to be the curriculum and instruction coordinator at a new high school. After one year away from her family, she accepted a position as an assistant principal in the area in which she lived and stayed there for six years. Next, she returned to the school where she spent her first year as an administrator to be a high school principal. She has completed two years at that school.

Participant #6 has a Bachelor of Science in social work. She was in the ministry with her husband for fifteen years. She then went to work at a college where she was responsible for working with the faculty and students of five departments. She also taught classes at the college in counseling and the Christian family. After moving to the central part of the state, she and her husband started a landscape business. She kept books, took care of their four children, drove a mower, designed landscapes and started her masters in special education. When her family decided to move to the eastern part of the state, she transferred to another university and found employment in social work. Three months later she accepted a lateral entry special education position at a middle school. She worked full-time and went to school

full-time. For the next nine years, her job was in an alternative class at the middle school level, where she was responsible for designing the program and the curriculum. After going back to school to obtain her administrative license, she came to her present school as the assistant principal. After serving in that capacity for four years, she was named principal and has completed two years in the position.

Participant #7 was an assistant football coach at North Carolina State University and held a major in history. He taught history and coached at a high school for fifteen years before getting his master's degree in administration and becoming a high school assistant principal. After spending five years at the same school, he moved to the eastern part of the state to become a high school principal and has just finished his second year.

#### The Education of Administrators

The focus of my study was the professional development of assistant principals and the role of that development in preparing them for the principalship. I assumed that those holding administrative certificates attended colleges or universities with accredited programs and that they were exposed to the appropriate coursework. Another reason for my lack of focus on this topic was the amount of research which addresses Master of School Administration programs and their preparation of administrators. I was, however, curious as to the perceived usefulness and applicability of the programs completed by the participants.

Participants #1 and #3, who attended the same university, felt that the internship, not the coursework, played an important part in preparing them for an administrative career. During the internship, Master of School Administration candidates work in schools full time as a principal intern for two semesters. Some colleges and universities have the intern working in a different school each semester while others allow the intern to stay in one

school for the entire school year. Participant #1 commented, “The internship component of my MSA program was most helpful because I did my internship in this system so I pretty much knew the ins and outs of how things worked when I got my job. I knew the set-up of the school and everything so the biggest help was being able to work in the same system as I did my internship. But as far as the classes go, they didn’t really help.” Just as participant #1 benefited most from the application aspect of her internship, participant #3 stressed that she learned by doing: “My MSA program didn’t really prepare me for the assistant principalship or the principalship. I think I got the best experience I could by just doing things.”

Participants #2, #4 and #7, who attended the same university (but different from #1 and #3), felt that their Master of School Administration experience met most of their needs and prepared them well for public school administration. Participant #2 felt that, “My MSA program, especially the internship, prepared me well. Since I did rotations during my internship, I would have felt comfortable going to any level school even though I had only taught elementary.” Participant #4 agreed that her program prepared her well, but felt that her years of experience were the most important factor of her administrative preparation.

I feel like the experience I had in the classroom was what I relied upon as an administrator as opposed to what I learned in my MSA classes. I had either the experience I needed from the classroom or the knowledge I needed from my MSA program.

Participant #7 simply stated that his experience included a “very good program.” He added that the program was “rigorous” but that “having those high standards made me a better administrator.”

Participant #5 also had positive things to say about her graduate experience.

I think my MSA program prepared me pretty well for most of my assistant principalships. Some courses, like those focused on elementary, obviously haven't been of much assistance but I didn't know at the time that I would be in high schools. I guess it was good for me to have the K-12 preparation.

Participant #6, who attended the same university as #5, did not comment on her experience as she already held a Master's and completed only the certification for administration.

### The Assistant Principalship

The purpose of this section is to allow the reader to develop a picture of the participants as assistant principals. Two topics discussed are the participants' responsibilities and duties and assistant principals and the preparation they received for the principalship as assistant principals.

### *Responsibilities and Duties*

Participant #1 made the following comments about her responsibilities and duties as an assistant principal.

I did all of the discipline. I did all of the classroom observations. He [the principal] did the summatives at the end but I did all of the formative ones. I was here at 7:30am and had duty out front being visible and greeting the children. From there, the principal and I both went into the cafeteria to finish out breakfast duty. Then, if there was a lot of bus discipline, if lots of kids were outside waiting, we would split that up. From that point on, probably after 9:30a.m. to 10:00a.m., I was pretty much in the classroom the rest of the day, which was good.

We had pacing guides that year for the first time so I was responsible for getting those together and making sure the benchmark assessments were done and scored – I collected all the data for that, then distributed the information to the teachers. I was pretty much responsible for everything dealing with curriculum that year, which was a big help when I became the principal. In the afternoons, if I came back in and there were a lot of kids in here I helped with discipline again. Basically, I was out in the classrooms all day.

Participant #2 stated that she was responsible for “typical things” but that she and her principal shared the work.

During the first semester, I took half of the faculty and he took the other half, then we switched at mid-year so each of us had an opportunity to work with all teachers. The principal and I shared the discipline. One thing that took lots of time was buses. My principal shared that responsibility with me, but I put payroll in every month.

She also had experience with the budget.

He [the principal] would bring the remediation budget to me and tell me it was totally mine. That was helpful because it was the first time I had worked with any kind of budget. I had to make sure my money would last for all four intercessions and line up personnel.

She was also given some responsibilities by the school system.

In my school system, assistant principals were responsible for testing. I went to all the meetings and I had to make sure I understood exactly how everything was done. I set it up so mock tests were just like the End Of Grade tests. Assistant principals were also responsible for all Initially Licensed Teachers (ILTs) so I went to all of those

meetings, then came back and shared with the faculty, particularly the ILTs and mentors.

Participant #3 listed fewer duties than others when speaking of his assistant principalship.

The duties he [the principal] assigned me as the assistant principal were essentially discipline and buses. There was also morning duty, where I watched the entire student population as they unloaded buses and congregated in the field on the side of the school. I was in the cafeteria for all three lunches and back outside in the afternoons for bus and car duty.

Participant #4 had two different sets of duties, one set for each school she serviced as an assistant principal.

As a middle school assistant principal I was responsible for breakfast duty, discipline, and bus discipline. At the beginning of my second year there, the superintendent wanted each of the assistant principals to have a focus. My area was curriculum and instruction, but I was still responsible for bus discipline. Evaluations were split three ways between the principal and the two assistant principals. I collected money and supervised athletic events. Around that time, we implement a testing program called IMS. I was responsible for that program at my school, including training all of the teachers.

As an assistant principal at a K-2 school, her role changed slightly.

I did morning duty in the cafeteria, bus discipline and was in charge of all of the curriculum and instruction. I didn't have to do school-wide discipline because the principal handled that. I implemented Accelerated Reader, STAR Reading and

Reading Olympics, an incentive program for students. I also supervised and monitored, did evaluations, talked with parents, and the other usual administrative things.

The principals who worked with participant #5 utilized her certification in curriculum and instruction. She was “in charge of the entire curriculum and instruction program” at one school. “I did all of the curriculum, the evaluations, and the summatives. I was the instructional leader of that school. I did a lot of the discipline as well. I also did a lot of the SACS stuff.”

Other than buses and discipline, participant #6 mentioned only her responsibility for planning events such as celebrations while participant #7 simply stated that he “did a little bit of everything” as “She [the principal] allowed me to be involved in curriculum, personnel and other things. I didn’t just sit and do discipline all day.”

The comments made by the participants show that they had varying responsibilities including discipline, curriculum, testing and personnel. The principal usually played a role in the determination of the assistant principal’s responsibilities. Participant #2 mentioned that the principal “would bring the remediation budget to me and tell me it was mine.” Other statements made with respect to the importance of the principal in this area was “the duties he [the principal] assigned me” (Participant #3) and “she [the principal] allowed me to be involved” (Participant #7). The principal was an important factor in the amount of administrative exposure assistant principal received.

#### Being Prepared to Assume the Principalship

The amount and types of administrative exposure an assistant principal receives can affect his or her readiness to assume the principalship since the assistant principalship is

often a stepping stone to the principalship. The assistant principal's position can be utilized by supervising principals and central office supervisors and administrators as an opportunity to train, groom and prepare assistant principals to one day assume the head leadership position of the school. I was interested to know if this was a priority for those working with the participants. If so, I wanted to know the type and amount of training offered to participants during their assistant principalships. If not, I wanted to know the participants' suggestions so that I could incorporate some of the ideas into my program.

Four of the participants shared with me their feelings of preparation or lack of preparation for the principalship while in the assistant principalship. Participant #1 stated that the school system took the initiative to include assistant principals in professional development through meetings. The monthly assistant principal meetings served as a professional book club: "We read up to date literature and book reviews and discussed them and that helped a lot."

Two participants spoke highly of the administration preparation provided by their principals. Participant #5 said,

I was fortunate that most of my principals took the initiative to bring me in and say, "You need to know how to do this." Others just brought things to me and said, "You're in charge of this, this and this. See ya! Let me know if you need anything." I went to them and asked them to clarify things but it was pretty much up to me to get the job done.

Participant #7's principal seemed to have a well-rounded approach. He noted,

My principal gave me a good preparation for the principalship because I did a little bit of everything. She allowed me to be involved in curriculum, personnel and other

things. I didn't just sit and do discipline all day. She exposed me to things by giving me the responsibility. We talked about what I needed to know but I think she already knew it. She would just give it to me.

Participant #6 was not as pleased with her preparation as she felt distanced from her principals.

I don't think they deliberately tried to hide anything from me. I wish those relationships had been very open to the point that they wanted to share everything with me. If you don't have those experiences you will be behind. My first year as a principal, I had no clue what was expected of me and I should have known. I had been here for three years.

The comments of the participants with respect to being prepared to assume the responsibilities of the principalship can be summarized in their own words – involving, sharing and including. These words support the idea that the best practice is hands-on, dealing with real-life situations, learning by doing...constructivism.

### The Principalship

The information in this section makes a shift from the participants' views of their assistant principalships to their present position as principals. Attention is given to responsibilities and duties, preparing their assistant principals for the principalship and sources of assistance for new principals.

#### *Responsibilities and Duties*

As a principal, participant #1 has many and varying responsibilities throughout the course of the day and the school year.

I do lots of PR (public relations) stuff – more of that than I thought. Lots of parents coming in and just wanting to chat and share. There are also lots of meetings. I guess the biggest things I do are PR and paperwork. But I still try to stick to my schedule. I try to be out front by 8:00a.m., then I go to the cafeteria, then back in here by 8:30a.m. to do announcements. Other than that, it's just whatever the day brings. The biggest things I feel a sense of responsibility for are teacher evaluations, testing and accountability, and systematic kinds of things like maintenance – making sure the building is clean and checking behind your custodians. Lots of management kinds of things.

Participant #2 mentioned developing a school-wide discipline policy, working with the School Improvement Team and dealing with personnel issues as some of her responsibilities as principal. She commented, “The biggest responsibility that I have now...is the budget.” Participant #3 adds to that list of responsibilities building “collegiality, common ground and mutual respect.” Other duties included morning duty, meeting with parents, monitoring instruction by walking around throughout the day and being present at after school activities and events. She also mentioned the emotional aspects of the job.

I find myself trying to be proactive and think things out. I make sure I consider all the consequences of a decision so for me, it's a lot of mental energy. Running the school takes a lot of planning, a lot of thinking and a lot of talking. It consumes me. Participant #4 felt that she does some of it all in her position as principal.

I've dealt with parents and everything else across the board. Parents who want their child in a certain teacher's room, those who don't want their child in a certain teacher's room, those who can't get their children to school on time and have lots of

excuses – just a wide gamut of things that I never dealt with as an assistant principal.

I never realized how much time was involved in talking to these people. I have parents, teachers, teacher assistants, central office personnel and others in and out of my office all day. Basically, I don't get any work done during the school day. I stay late after school or come back on Saturday and Sunday. I worked hard as an assistant principal but I work harder as a principal because I am responsible for everything.

In addition to walking throughout the building to monitor in the mornings, at breaks and during lunch, participant #5 noted total responsibility for all money, preparation of the student and faculty handbooks, and working with the leadership team as major responsibilities. Other areas of responsibility included curriculum and instruction, staff development and SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools). Duties mentioned by participant #6 were overseeing staff meetings, initiating action plans, dealing with staff members and angry parents, communicating with the school improvement team, writing the school improvement plan, and preparing her assistant principal to take over her school.

Participant #7 commented,

As a principal, you go to more meetings. You spend more time on curriculum. It is always a challenge to organize the school to best use the talents of the teachers. The teachers here do a good job; it's just a matter of me getting out of the way and letting them do what they do best. I need to know what's going on, but I try to keep as much paperwork away from them as I can. As an administrator my job is to support the teacher and the classroom. That is the bottom line.

The participants' comments provide evidence that the principalship is full of varying responsibilities – public relations, accountability, budgeting, personnel, and others too

numerous to mention. It seems that anything and everything in the building is ultimately the responsibility of the principal.

### *Sources of Assistance*

With so many new and different responsibilities, I was interested to know where new principals turned for help. This information is also important when considering the mentoring aspect of a program for assistant principals. I hoped to gather from their comments with whom they felt comfortable and trusted when asking for assistance.

Participant #1 turned to a variety of places for answers to her questions.

When other things came up that I wasn't sure about how to do I called the other principals. I would call the principal at the primary school [which feeds this school] and at the middle school, the one I did my internship with. Basically, I depended on these the most. I also called our curriculum coordinator at the central office – she's really good to work with. And I called my superintendent anytime I needed anything.

Participant #2 echoed those ideas, saying,

When I have questions about budget or other things, I have no problem getting help. I feel like I get lots of support. I have a mentor at the county office who is a former principal and I call her or the appropriate person at the county office if I have a question that relates to one of their areas. If it is a school question or one less important, I call other principals in the system.

Participant #7 added,

It helps to be able to get on the phone and talk to someone you know. Networking is good. You can ask your principal, someone at the county office or someone at another school. They can give you help and information about certain things.

While Participant #4 searches “every place I can to find information and answers,” Participant #3 is more cautious. “When I had a question with budget or something else, I would call central office and ask a supervisor, one of the ones I could trust. There are about four people there that I would call on for help.” Trust is also an issue for Participant #5. “I still call some of my former principals because they serve as mentors for me. I’ve worked with them and I trust them.” Participant #6 agreed that a mentor is a good source of help. “When I had a question, I called my mentor. I wasn’t given a mentor but I designated two to myself – the two principals I worked with as an assistant principal.”

It seems that the participants felt most comfortable turning to other principals and staff members in the central office. Regardless of the position of the person turned to for assistance, one factor that new principals considered when selecting someone to provide help was trustworthiness.

#### Preparing Assistant Principals for the Principalship

The comments made by participants make reference to the fact that when they entered their principalships there were many tasks to complete as well as many new responsibilities. One participant (#6) commented that she was not prepared as a first-year principal. In most situations, assistant principals are in their first administrative position and do not know what tasks they will be responsible for as principals. As the only other administrator in the school, the principal can provide a wealth of information and can take on an important role in grooming his/her assistant principal for the principalship. With this in mind, I was interested to know how the participants viewed their role in preparing their own assistant principals for the principalship.

Four participants made suggestions for preparing assistant principals for the principalship. Participant #2 had many ideas.

I think the two [the principal and the assistant principal] should have a chance to sit down on a regular basis to discuss things. At least once each week, a scheduled, uninterrupted time should be set so they can share information from the principals' meeting or central office, events happening at the school, and issues with students, parents and teachers that have transpired and other things. The principal and assistant principal should share observations, buses, discipline – everything – because it is too consuming for the assistant principal to do alone. Without help, she would never get to be involved with curriculum and instruction and other things.

Due to transfers within the county, Participant #3 was in the process of getting a new assistant principal and spoke about how she could best prepare her for the principalship.

I think I can prepare the assistant principal that will be coming here for a principalship by including her in everything. That will give her an opportunity to see how things work. She's got to see it and be a part of it in order to learn it. So, as I'm doing things, I'll share them with her. That's the way it worked with the other assistant principal. We did almost everything together. We were almost like co-principals in a sense.

Participant #4 had a similar idea.

To prepare my assistant principal for these things, I share as much with her as I can – budget, personnel and just what's going on. I want to make sure she has as much information about a situation or issue as I have because if I'm away I want her to be able to take over and deal with it. I would also suggest that assistant principals go

with principals to monthly meetings and any kind of leadership training. This year, assistant principals will meet monthly with the assistant superintendent for curriculum for a round-table time of sharing of experiences and concerns. I think that is an excellent idea.

Participant #6 commented on how she prepared her assistant principal.

When my assistant principal came in, I explained to him how things would be. I would be very up front with him and everything I did, he would do. Everything I was involved in, he was involved in. If we were doing budget, he was in here. If we were doing hiring, he was in here. Whatever I did, I felt like in order for him to be knowledgeable as a principal, he needed to do all of those things.

Just as when talking about being prepared for principals themselves, the participants reiterated the words sharing, involving, and including. They feel that principals don't have to make special efforts to provide assistant principals with opportunities to practice administration, they simply need to let them be a part of the administration that already exists at the school.

### Topics

The major purpose of the interviews was to determine the areas in which principals felt most challenged or least prepared. The purpose of the research was to put the information learned from the interviews into action because "operating by the seat of one's pants is not the best way *to do* the principalship" (Robbins & Alvy, 1995, 72). Therefore, I first had to analyze the information gathered from the interviews to determine which topics should be part of the research of preparing assistant principals for the principalship and then

group topics in such a way as to form an outline. Based on participants' responses, the following outline of topics was developed.

## I. Management

- A. Budget and finance
- B. Facilities' management
- C. Organizational issues
  - 1. Scheduling
  - 2. School system programs, policies and procedures
- D. Personnel relations
- E. Customer service and public relations

## II. Leadership

- A. Decision making
- B. School improvement planning
- C. Curriculum and instruction
  - 1. Testing and accountability
  - 2. Exceptional children
  - 3. Instructional programs
- D. Professional development
  - 1. Technology
  - 2. Current Topics

For each topic I reviewed comments made by participants during the interviews, reviewed literature related to the topic and then provided an idea for hands-on practice.

Robbins and Alvy (1995) note that “as practitioners, we need to make sure that schedules work, the chalk is in the classroom, and transition times run smoothly” (p.10). Daresh (2001) adds that of all skills, management skills probably have the “highest priority for development” for new principals (p.23). Many of the comments of the research participants support the notion that management skills should be a priority when preparing assistant principals to become principals. Specifically, five areas of management were mentioned during participant interviews: school finance, facilities’ management, school organization, and personnel relations and customer service.

### *School finance*

Not only must the principal be concerned with “budgetary categories, the coding of items, budgetary time lines, whether funds can be used for one program or another, possibilities for transferring funds from one line to another” and “maximizing allocation based on student attendance,” he or she must simultaneously be concerned with “whether an instructional item is a textbook or workbook, or a consumable or non-consumable” and “Should the new laser disc player be purchased from the library budget or the science budget?” (Robbins & Alvy, 1998, p.63).

Six of the seven participants mentioned the need for more knowledge and practice with the budget. Participant #1 commented that a program for assistant principals should “focus on budget.” Participant #2 noted that her Master of School Administration program “didn’t prepare me for...the budget. I never learned how you could transfer money to get things done...stuff I should know how to do to be efficient with my funds.” She adds, “The biggest responsibility that I have now that I was not ready for is the budget.” Participant #3 mentioned that one of her challenges was “learning to set up the budget the way this county

does it, coding items and making sure you're spending money on the right types of things.”

Participant #4 echoed the others, saying, “The only thing as a principal that I deal with that I didn't have experience with is the budget.” Participant #5 agreed. “I feel like I was well prepared in all areas but one - budget. You have these classes but it's not like being totally responsible for all of the money that comes through all of the different line items.”

Participant #6 simply stated, “I didn't have practice with the budget.”

There are five principles for a sound school finance system: equity, efficiency, adequacy, accountability and stability (National Conference of State Legislatures, 1996). A sound finance system achieves equity by providing equally for all students and efficiency by making the best use of resources. It proves itself adequate by providing adequate resources so that teachers and students may achieve educational goals and standards set by the district and the state. A sound finance system achieves accountability by collecting and maintaining fiscal data to be used for evaluation and by applying proper budgeting, accounting and auditing procedures. Finally, it proves itself stable by being predictable with respect to revenues and expenditures over time.

With these five principles in mind, a principal plays the role of the budget analyst when planning and preparing the school's budget. As an analyst, the principal is expected to work with those of higher salaries and intimidating titles, such as district finance directors. He or she must be professional and carry out his or her tasks with confidence, keeping an open line of communication, both verbal and written, with those involved in the budgeting process. He or she should also be knowledgeable of the other programs tied to the district's budget. Keeping such programs in mind, he or she should be flexible when planning the school's budget. (Drake & Roe, 1994, pp.465-466)

When analyzing the school's budget, the principal should consider the following:

- Contact the district's finance director to have a general understanding of how he or she wants the budgeting process to flow.
- Review past approved budgets and talk to those who developed them, such as other principals.
- Divide the budget into manageable sections, approaching each with an open mind.
- Analyze programs instead of dollars, striving to understand each program and what it is designed to achieve with consideration to re-occurring expenses, increased workloads, possible outcomes, effects on other programs, and appropriateness for the population.
- Keep budget worksheets and memos neat, clearly labeled and organized (Drake & Roe, 1994, pp.468-472).

Participants mentioned the effectiveness of getting hands-on training with respect to the budget. Therefore, an activity to apply some of the steps listed above while providing assistant principals with budgeting practice is to prepare a budget for one budget area, going through the same steps that the principal follows when preparing a school budget. For example, assistant principals can develop a budget for PRC 072 funds, money intended to increase the achievement of students who score at a level one or two on the North Carolina End of Grade Tests. The assistant principal can review the chart of accounts to determine what monies may be used for, then meet with the school improvement team to determine the needs of the students. The assistant principal is responsible for providing the team with testing information (demographic, grade level,

etc.) so data driven decisions can be made and after preparing spreadsheets and a memo, meets with the finance director to defend, edit and implement the budget.

Other ideas include preparing a mock budget for the school, reporting to the finance director or other person appointed by the superintendent to assist with the activity and allowing assistant principals to interview principals in the county to determine their methods of preparing the budget for their schools and. A new principal, “may well be overwhelmed by the scope and complexity of the task at hand. Nothing can completely prepare for that first attempt, but most bright, inquisitive, energetic people survive” (Drake & Roe, 1994, p.465).

#### *Facilities' Management*

Participant #1 stated that one area of challenge was “Maintenance – making sure the building is clean and checking behind your custodians” and that this was one thing, “I didn’t get to do as an AP [assistant principal]...upkeep of the facility.” Robbins and Alvy (1995) state that “the physical appearance of a school can contribute to a positive or negative school climate or morale. Conversely, the physical appearance of a school reflects the climate” (p.13). Therefore, the principal’s role is to learn about the school’s environment to insure that it is both clean and safe, even in areas typically far away from the principal’s office such as the physical education facilities (Robbins & Alvy, 1998).

Observing the building for issues of safety and cleanliness can be accomplished through Management by Wandering Around (MBWA). “MBWA involves the principal purposefully getting out from behind the desk and walking around the school,” having “a clear plan for where the wandering will occur” (Robbins & Alvy, 1995, p.14). This can be done during school, providing the principal an opportunity to speak to staff and students. It

can also be done before or after school so time can be taken to look at bulletin boards, student centers and student work. In either case, the principal should have a list of areas and rooms in the school and should make notes as each one is visited. He or she should inspect lights, electrical plugs, and the condition of the floors, ceilings and windows. The principal should also look for signs of water damage, plumbing problems, and wear to the outside of the building while foci inside the building should include the contents of the classroom including desks and instructional materials. MBWA should address anything that can effect the neatness, cleanliness, safety and attractiveness of the building (Daresh, 2001).

An activity related to the management of facilities is to have each assistant principal develop and use a MBWA grid. It should include a list of all areas of the school, listing classrooms and offices individually, with space to record the date the area was visited and comments. Over the period of one month, the MBWA grid should be completed.

### *Organizational Issues*

Organizational issues include scheduling and school district programs, policies and procedures. This section covers each of these topics, including participant comments, ideas found in literature and suggestions of activities that would give assistant principals practice.

#### *Scheduling*

“One of the most demanding assignments facing the modern-day principal is the integration and application of organizational concepts as they relate to the daily operation of a school. The principal is...an organizational engineer” (Saville, 1973, p.vii). As a high school principal, Participant #7 mentioned that “Scheduling has been a challenge” because he lets the “needs of the students drive the schedule.” He adds, “It is always a challenge to organize the school to best use the talents of the teachers.”

Since the participant who referred to scheduling as a challenge is a high school principal, the literature explored focused on secondary scheduling. According to Saville (1973), there are fourteen elements that should be considered in the determination of a schedule. They include:

1. The specific courses to be offered in a school program.
2. The organization of the curriculum – whether on an activity or core basis, or on an individual subject basis.
3. The organization of the school day: the hours of sessions, the length of periods, use of double periods.
4. The impact of extending the school day for extra sessions.
5. The effect of collegiate attendance plans, when students attend classes at college campuses and get both high school and college credit.
6. The use of mid-year promotions and graduations.
7. The incorporations of work experiences and other extended school programs.
8. The use of an activity period for meetings of clubs and other groups.
9. The operation of homeroom and assembly periods.
10. The normal and permitted subject loads for students.
11. The consideration of required subjects.
12. The maximum and minimum class sizes permitted for various subjects.
13. The basis of the methods for assigning pupils to class sections (sex, race, etc.)
14. The policies on the control of class interruptions and schedule irregularities (p.5).

Since the scheduling of a school is such a huge task, a mock schedule may not be feasible, especially at the secondary level. High school assistant principals may practice

scheduling through observation and participation. Scheduling often occurs in the summer when many assistant principals are not employed or are assigned to other sites to direct summer school programs. School districts should make it possible for principals and their assistant principals to work together on the schedule. Preparing a mock schedule may be a productive activity for elementary or middle school assistant principals, based on Participant #3's comment, "I got the best experience I could just by doing things."

*District programs, policies and procedures*

The following statement describes an area of challenge for many new principals.

It seems that each school has a myriad of forms. The district office, as well as state and federal governments, require specific forms...for purchase orders, preliminary budgetary estimates, field trips, textbook requisitions, instructional technology purchases and servicing, professional development, and average daily attendance, to name just a few (Robbins & Alvy, 1998, p.62).

Participant #1 agreed that this area was one of challenge, specifically mentioning "Logistical kinds of things. If you had never done them before, you had no clue." She also alluded to the fact that things are different from district to district when she stated "Budget here is done differently." Participant #2 mentioned a specific program used for buses that "took lots of time. It took me a while to get used to that. I had to pull the manual out every month." She also mentioned the need for assistant principals to be exposed to "information about policies and procedures" and "technical things." Participant #3 agreed. "When I became a principal there were little things that I didn't know how to do. One was learning...the way this county does it [budget]."

Literature pertaining to this exact topic is sparse. Robbins and Alvy (1998) believe that principals need to learn federal and state codes, district policies and school site rules and regulations in addition to figuring out the forms and systems used by the school and school district. Daresh (2001) suggests working with district personnel to learn such procedures. Therefore, a suggestion of an activity for assistant principals would be to interview principals and those in the central office to obtain copies of forms which are used, reports which are submitted, etc, and maintain a file of such forms and reports, with instructions as to how to complete them. This could be done by a group of assistant principals, each researching a particular area (special education, discipline, buses, budgets, etc.), then reporting back to the group to share the forms and information.

#### *Personnel Relations*

“The principal has the job of creating and maintaining an atmosphere of respect, trust and confidence – all leading toward good human relations” (Fox & Schwartz, 1965, p.122). Robbins and Alvy (1998) add, “A major concern for all principals is the value of developing a strong positive relationship with the faculty” (p.45). Participants made many comments concerning human relations. Participant #1 stated, “The faculty did not want me to be the principal...they thought I was too young and inexperienced to be able to handle being a principal and they were concerned about having a female as a leader.” Participant #2 noted that making some changes in the school’s organizational structure “caused a division between me and them [teachers].” Participant #3 expressed that her faculty is “difficult to deal with. I continue to talk to them again and again, trying to get them to see a different point of view.” She added, “Adults are worse than kids for making a big deal of petty issues and abusing privileges.” Participant #4 mentioned having relationship problems with teacher

assistants. Participant #6 mentioned that it is a struggle to do everything her job entails and “listen to a complaining faculty.”

Robbins and Alvy (1995) recommend ten “commonsense suggestions” to help principals work with the staff.

1. Be a person first and a principal second by showing your human side. Let the staff know that you are approachable and genuine.
2. Be consistent about what matters to create credibility and provide the staff with a sense of security about what can be expected of the principal.
3. Never lose sight of the vision and your role in fostering the vision.
4. Take time to look at people: smile, respond, and laugh. Sincere interaction shows others that you care.
5. Use active listening so people sense that you are really listening and that you do care. Active listening involves looking people in the eye, asking questions for clarification, nodding as a person speaks and summarizing what a person says.
6. Look for the best in people and communicate by dignifying them. This will allow you to build trust and get the best response from the staff.
7. Take another person’s perspective as a means of developing empathy and providing insight to his or her views and needs.
8. Respect and nurture diversity as a means of tapping new levels of creativity that enable the staff to collectively face challenges.
9. Be accessible, open and supportive so staff members will be able to connect to you during times of need or change.

10. Remember that little things can make a big difference in people's lives (pp.46-48).

Hunter & Russell (1995) give suggestions for working, in particular, with difficult teachers and staff members. These include: 1) analyze and prioritize desired behavior changes, 2) work through the strengths to attack the weaknesses, 3) make communication, both oral and written, clear and specific, 4) acknowledge and accept the person's feelings, 5) make records of all expectations and interactions, 6) give the person choices about how and where to begin, and 7) plan subsequent meetings to discuss and document progress and needs.

Some of the participants offered ideas for personnel relations. Participant #3 mentioned talking through problems.

I talk to them about the community's perception of the teachers here. It's negative and that's not what we want it to be. We want it to change so we've been talking about what we want the perception to be, what we want people to think about us and what we are doing in the school and how we make this change with students and trying to be proactive and think things out.

Participant #5 has her own method of establishing a relationship with teachers.

I usually get here around 7:20 a.m. and walk around. Some of the teachers get here as early as 7:00 a.m. and I try to speak to them and see if they've got everything they need for the day. They seem to appreciate that a whole lot and it endears me to them. This past year I decided that I would go and visit teachers in their classrooms when I'm not observing them, just to chat with them and see what I could do for them.

Once they realized that I had not come to ask them a favor or to observe them but that

I was just being human, I think it meant a lot. They are much more willing now to come and talk to me instead of going to the assistant principal. They come directly to me and ask for help.

Participant #6 applied the idea of being human to establishing credibility and letting the faculty get to know her.

One thing I did was go to an eighth grade teacher. I was applying for the doctoral program and you had to write a paper on your history, desires and those kinds of things. I asked her to read it and critique it for me. It made her aware of what I was doing and a little bit about me. Knowing faculties the way you know faculties, you know what happened – she shared it, of course. Then I tried to get to know all of them and understand what they were about.

Participant #7 offers a final suggestion.

I don't like to send a memo. You have to keep up with things, do the paper work and document but I like to see people eyeball to eyeball, in private, if there is a problem. You have to treat people like people and not like things. You don't tell them to do it, you ask them to do it and you respect them.

I consider personnel relations one of the toughest areas of administration to master because it is connected to personalities, which are not typically “changeable” but are “workable.” Therefore, it is important for the administrator to know how the faculty perceives him or her and where his or her areas of strengths and weaknesses lie. One activity that would provide such information would be to develop a (or find an existing) survey and give it to the faculty, to be completed anonymously. From the information gathered, the assistant principal can develop an individual growth plan. Using personal reflection and a

second administration of the survey (at the end of the year), personal growth with respect to personnel relations can be observed.

### *Customer Service*

Traveled recently? Were you astounded by how fast you obtained the keys to your rental car? Did your mouth water when you smelled that fresh cookie the hotel clerk was wrapping for your check-in welcome? Chances are if you were astounded, it was not by chance (Clement, 2002).

As school leaders, principals should want their customers – students, parents and community members – to be astounded by the high quality of service received in our schools.

Participants mentioned public relations as a challenging area of the principalship.

Participant #4 commented:

I've dealt with parents and everything else across the board...things that I never dealt with as an assistant principal. I never realized how much time was involved in talking to these people. I have parents, teachers, teacher assistants, central office personnel and others in and out of my office all day. I think PR is more important than curriculum and instruction because if you can communicate well and work well with parents, teachers and central office staff, you'll be able to move forward in other areas.

Participant #1 stated that assistant principals need to focus on "Customer service – how to deal with the community and the parents." Participant #6 also mentioned communicating with parents as an area in which she needed more practice because "It takes time to show parents that you will take care of their children and treat them fairly. When those issues come up you have to keep your cool and show people that you can handle situations."

Participant #7 provides another reason assistant principals need practice in public relations.

“When people come in the door they want to see the principal. They know that the principal is going to make the final decision at the school level.”

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA, n.d.) believes that a school should maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the public it serves. The group believes that planning is a very important part of public relations and recommends a ten-step planning process. Administrators should address the following:

1. Meet with the superintendent or a representative from the central office to discuss their priorities for a public relations plan and how the plan can relate to the mission and goals of the school system.
2. Conduct internal and external research.
3. Develop measurable short-term and long-term public relations goals and objectives through a committee of *customers*.
4. Identify target publics, those who are instrumental in achieving the goals and those who may be reached indirectly by public relations strategies.
5. Identify the desired behavior of the publics.
6. Use research to identify what is needed to achieve desired behavior.
7. Create procedures to reach the public and the actions which must be taken to carry them out.
8. Put the plan on paper including the budget, timeline and persons responsible for each procedure.
9. Implement the plan.

10. Evaluate the plan using the same methods used to research the plan in the initial phases.

One phase of the planning process that may be beneficial for assistant principals to practice is the second step, internal and external research. Clement (2002) suggests conducting research through a customer service audit using site visits to inspect the physical conditions of the building and using parent and student focus groups to gather opinions of service by asking open-ended questions. In addition, confidential staff surveys are used to allow employees to rank and comment on the quality of the school's service, and mystery phone calls determine how parents and others are serviced through phone communication.

#### *Summary*

As Robbins and Alvy (1995) note, "any discussion on leadership can be a romantic concept if leadership is not discussed hand-in-hand with management. One has to manage leadership" (p. 10). The discussion of management included the topics of budget and finance, facilities' management, organizational issues of scheduling and district policies, procedures and programs as well as personnel relations. Though these issues center around management, all aspects of the principalship rely on a certain amount of leadership to get things accomplished, often by a group, in a civil, timely, and proper fashion. The next section of the chapter deals with those topics that go hand-in-hand with management, the topics related to leadership.

#### *Leadership*

Since the methodology of this research is based on constructivism, the idea that assistant principals can best prepare for the principalship by "doing," it is proper that leadership be defined by its constructivist meaning. Leadership is "the reciprocal learning

processes that enable participants in a community to construct meaning toward a shared purpose” (Lambert, 1998). This definition assumes these attributes:

- leadership is not a trait; leadership and leader are not the same.
- leadership is about learning that leads to constructive change.
- everyone has the potential and right to work as a leader.
- leading is a shared endeavor.
- leadership requires the redistribution of power and authority.

In striving to achieve this definition of leadership, the participants identified four areas of challenge – decision making, school improvement planning, curriculum and instruction and professional development. For each of these topics, I will review the participants’ comments, review related literature and suggest one activity to provide assistant principals with practice.

### *Decision making*

Daresh (2001) believes that decisiveness – “The ability to recognize when a decision is required and act quickly” is an administrative skill necessary for principals (p.35). Simultaneously, “Every decision should be consistent with the goals of your school system, your particular building, and education in general” (Fox & Schwartz, 1965, p.94). Since a principal’s decisions often affect many people, he or she must learn the art of decision making and practice it reflectively.

Participants’ comments validate the need for new principals to have a grasp of how decisions are made. Participant #4 noted, “You have to be very aware of how you respond to situations. Deciding when to involve others in a decision or when to simply dictate can be

difficult. Even a little decision can be tough.” Participant #6 agreed: “I didn’t really feel prepared...to think through things rationally, calmly and completely, knowing that the consequences would be great for me and other people.” She also stated that as a principal, “I had to make harder decisions that I did before.”

The Josephson Institute of Ethics (1991) views the process of making decisions as the *marriage* of ethical decision making and principled reasoning. Ethical decision making relies on ten values, identified through a survey of thousands of people, when making judgements: honesty, integrity, promise keeping, loyalty/fidelity, fairness, concern for others, respect for others, law abidingness/civic duty, pursuit of excellence and personal accountability. In order to make sound decisions, these values are applied to the five steps of principled reasoning:

1. Clarify – Determine precisely what must be decided. Develop a range of alternatives and from these choose at least three ethically justifiable options.
2. Evaluate – Evaluate the facts and assumptions carefully. Distinguish between facts and mere opinions that may result in rationalizations. Consider the benefits and risks associated with each option.
3. Decide – After evaluating the information available, make a judgement about what is or is not true, and about what consequences are most likely to occur.
4. Implement – Once a decision is made of what to do, develop a plan of how to implement the decision in a way that maximizes the benefit and minimizes the costs and risks.

5. Monitor and modify – Monitor the effects of decisions and be prepared and willing to revise a plan, or take a different course of action, based on new information (pp.5-6).

The adage “practice makes perfect” is very applicable to decision making. Therefore, an activity to help assistant principals prepare for decision making is simply practice and reflection. Going through Josephson’s five steps and writing each step down may help the administrator memorize and internal the process. The desired result is the ability to consistently make ethical, principal-reasoned decisions with little stress involved, even when faced with decisions that must be made quickly or very difficult, complex decisions.

### *School Improvement Planning*

“Planning is not an abstract, theoretical, impractical concept; it is a way of getting things done. Planning can result in improvement in specific areas. Planning is done to bring about changes. Planning is essential in setting goals” (Fox & Schwartz, 1965, p.48).

Participants mentioned many challenges they have experienced related to school improvement planning. Participant #2 stated, “Another issue is the school improvement team. It has not been very effective because the members say they can’t speak for their co-workers.” Participant #3 noted that assistant principals need exposure to, “The whole process of school improvement planning. We have a Title I plan, a School Improvement Plan, a Safe School Plan, a Limited English Proficiency Plan, and others.” Participant #5 mentioned working with the leadership team and Participant #6 noted initiating action plans, communicating with the school improvement team and writing the school improvement plan as elements of her school improvement planning process.

One of the most important factors, and the foundation of the school improvement planning process is making sure that staff members have developed a vision that promotes the achievement of students, and the teaching and learning related to that achievement. Changes that occur as a result of school improvement planning and are consistent with the vision are usually accepted with greater enthusiasm (Robbins & Alvy, 1995).

The principal is very involved in school improvement planning, often being the person who oversees the school improvement team and its meetings. Therefore, the principal is often the person who must create an atmosphere for change, and change may be approached apprehensively by staff members. One way to alleviate this problem is for the principal to build a trusting relationship with the faculty and staff by making sure he or she does what he or she says, establishing credibility. The principal can also encourage others to talk about their definition of trustworthiness and then lead by exemplifying the definition provided. He or she can involve the faculty in consensus-building activities to share viewpoints and work as a team while encouraging disagreement. Finally, the principal can keep the lines of communication open and celebrate both small and large successes. These activities will build trust (Robbins & Alvy, 1995).

Once trust is established the principal can respond to faculty's concerns about the changes which will come about as a result of the school improvement planning process. Robbins & Alvy (1995) state that there are six stages of concern that must be responded to by the principal. Each phase, with an appropriate response, is explained below.

1. Awareness – The principal should provide information about the idea or program.
2. Informational – The principal should explain what the idea or program looks like in practice and should also provide specific examples.

3. Personal – The principal should share how the idea or program might affect student and teacher growth.
4. Management – The principal should invite users to demonstrate how they manage the use of an innovation.
5. Collaboration – The principal should regulate the ways that individuals can work together and share ideas.
6. Refocusing – The principal should stimulate a discussion and provide a comfortable setting so teachers can discuss how the idea or program can be enhanced or improved (p.76).

How can assistant principals practice establishing trust and responding to the concerns of staff members surrounding the change implemented by school improvement planning? Participant #3 offers one idea. “The assistant principal needs to practice being a facilitator – learning to include others and to delegate.” Being the chair of the School Improvement Team would give the assistant principal the opportunity to build trust with faculty and staff members while giving him or her practice in handling their expressions of concern. Writing the minutes of the meeting would give the assistant principal an opportunity to reflect on the dynamics of the school improvement team and what it is accomplishing.

### *Curriculum and Instruction*

Making sure that instructional and curricular goals are addressed is a challenge for all principals. Today’s newcomers believe that instructional and curriculum leadership are major responsibilities and that, if they are not immediately successful in these

areas, they are somewhat dissatisfied with their own performances (Robbins & Alvy, 1998, p.36).

The participants agreed that curriculum and instruction is a challenge of the principalship.

Participant #2 noted that knowledge of paperwork and the placement process of exceptional children, general knowledge of testing (the growth formula and modifications) and familiarity with the Standard Course of Study were essential for all assistant principals.

Participant #3 mentioned knowledge of instructional programs such as Title I as a challenge of her principalship. Participant #5 commented on the need for assistant principals to know about the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation process as well as staff development. Participant #7 stated, “Assistant principals need to get involved in curriculum...because you need a good curriculum base to be a good principal” and that as an administrator, “You must prepare yourself for...the next program you are implementing.”

In his article, “What School Principals Need to Know about Curriculum and Instruction,” Bottoms (2001) identifies six topics that should be of concern to principals in order for them to be competent instructional leaders.

- Principals need to understand the big ideas that should be taught in the core curriculum to be able to determine if students are being taught the knowledge and skills that they are expected to learn.
- Principals should know enough about state and national standards to help teachers identify the most important standards, the things that students should learn in the greatest depth.

- Principals should know about differentiation in instruction so that students in college-preparatory classes are not taught the same lesson as those in a regular class. Students who scored level three or four on the end of grade test should be as challenged by instruction and assignments as those students who scored level one or two.
- Principals must understand literacy. Reading, writing and speaking are learning tools that are essential across the curriculum and principal should be able to recognize whether teachers are advancing students' literacy skill by requiring students to use these skills in all courses.
- Principals need to know what students are supposed to learn and the standards they are supposed to meet in determining whether teachers' assessments are appropriate to measure students' learning.
- Principals need to know enough about assessment to be able to lead teams of teachers who are working together to develop grading guides and grade level or course assessments (pp.1-2).

Activities that may enhance the assistant principals' knowledge of curriculum and instruction center on participation. Using the Management By Walking Around principle mentioned earlier, the assistant principal, when wandering through the school, can pay attention to what teachers are teaching and compare these topics to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. This may allow the assistant principal to note if what is being taught is appropriate while simultaneously giving him or her practice in recognizing the curriculum for the appropriate grade level and subject. Other ideas include reviewing

teachers' lesson plans, attending team planning meetings to see how the curriculum is developed through instruction and activities and attending Individualized Education Plan meetings for the Exceptional Children's program. These activities and reflections should be recorded in the assistant principal's journal.

### *Professional Development*

Professional development is important for all educators, including principals. "The significance of becoming successfully acculturated through a desire to observe and learn each day cannot be overemphasized. Ideally, any individual taking on the principal's role should begin the job by embracing characteristics of the lifelong learner" (Robbins & Alvy, 1998, p.73). McCall (1994) adds, "The provident principal is the one who sits down with his or her teachers and learns with them" (p.108).

Participant #6 commented that finding time for her professional development has been challenging.

Another thing I need to do this year is staff development for myself. I have done none. I felt like I needed to be here, making sure things got done like they were supposed to. The first year as principal, I didn't go anywhere and last year I went to one thing.

Participant #7 noted that if given the chance to change something about his assistant principalship he would, "Make more time to study and read" because "Your preparation never ends. You have to constantly read, keep up, go to PEP [Principals' Executive Program] classes...you constantly prepare yourself for the next year or the next program you are implementing." Participant #5 noted technology as one particular area of focus for the professional development of assistant principals. "They need to...be very proficient in

technology...how to do PowerPoint presentations, set up databases, and do word processing. Technology is essential for communication.”

Robbins and Alvy (1995) comment that, “Taking a proactive approach is the only way to stay on top of the field regarding leadership and educational literature” because “no one else is going to take care of ensuring your professional growth” (p.256). Daresh (2001) believes “staying alive professionally” involves two areas, reading and participating in professional seminars, meetings, and conferences (p.64). A reading agenda is one way of staying abreast of current educational professional practice trends. Reading books and professional journals in one area is suggested, since it is impossible to be knowledgeable about everything. However, “The key is...to keep your mind alive and well so that it can be used as a valuable resource of knowledge” (Daresh, 2001, p.64-65). Attending professional activities affords assistant principals the opportunity to learn things about topics that are important or will be important as a principal as well as the opportunity to market oneself and network with other administrators.

In addition to reading and attending professional events, Robbins and Alvy (1995) mention the use of writing in a journal and developing a portfolio as means of professional development. A journal can foster professional development since it “can help one to reflect about the job. Often seeing one’s ideas in writing helps to affirm convictions and brings greater insight to a particular problem” (p.259). A portfolio is a valuable resource because it provides reflection over one or more years. It may include a personal mission statement, personal and school goals, and artifacts such as photographs, faculty meeting agendas, student work, journal entries or anything that demonstrates growth within a particular area or areas.

Many ideas for activities that may enhance professional have been suggested in the literature – writing in a journal, developing a portfolio, reading current educational books and journals and attending conferences and workshops. Participant #1 also gave an example of an activity that her school system implemented: “When we [assistant principals] met monthly, we read up to date literature and book reviews and discussed them.” In addition to writing in journals, sharing what has been learned with others is one way to internalize information. Therefore, upon returning from professional development activities, assistant principals should share information with the faculty and staff as well as other administrators. Such presentations would also provide a way for assistant principals to practice (and learn, if necessary) using presentation software such as PowerPoint. Other activities could be given to assistant principals to provide practice in word processing and databases.

#### Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the study’s participants by exploring their educational and professional experiences, to share their views about their preparation for school administration, their experiences as assistant principals, and their views on the principalship including responsibilities and sources of assistance. I analyzed the participants’ information about challenges they experienced as new principals. After determining emerging themes, I explored each topic individually by sharing participants’ comments, summarizing pertinent information from literature, and describing at least one activity that would provide practice for the assistant principal in the specified area.

The two major areas identified were management and leadership. Management topics included budget and finance, facilities’ management, organizational issues (including scheduling and school system programs, policies and procedures), personnel relations and

customer service and public relations. Leadership topics included decision making, school improvement planning, curriculum and instruction (including testing and accountability, exceptional children, and instructional programs), and professional development (including technology and current topics).

The issue that remains to be explored is the suggested implementation of a program that initiates strategies to address issues discussed in this chapter. The next chapter will address the participants' views about such implementation and suggestions as to how such a program may be organized.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### Introduction

Research conducted by Schmieder, McGrevin, and Townley (1994) found that the responsibilities and opportunities of the assistant principalship do not properly prepare an administrator for the principalship. Therefore, the purpose of my research was to determine the areas of challenge of first year principals and then provide suggestions as to how those areas can be incorporated into the assistant principalship through activities, allowing the assistant principalship to serve as a training ground for the principalship.

The previous chapter detailed the areas of challenge for first and second year principals. In this chapter, I will report participants' suggestions for the implementation of a training program for assistant principals, describe a suggested organization of the program, outline a sample program complete with topics and activities, note limitations of the program and discuss ideas for future research.

### Participant Suggestions

After providing participants with an overview of the purpose of a program to prepare assistant principals for the principalship, I asked for their input with respect to the implementation of such a program. My purpose was to have procedures and processes with which principals would feel comfortable.

Participant #2 commented,

The implementation would be the tricky part. It would depend on the documentation. If it was easy to do and went along with the assistant principal's evaluation, I would be willing to do it because it would kill two birds with one stone. If there was lots of paperwork associated with it, I would say to give it to someone in the central office

because it's not benefiting me as a principal. Some would say that my principal didn't do it for me so why should I do it for them? I can see a problem if the principal and assistant principal do not work together well. The principal could make up information or not implement the program well and the AP would not benefit. Although also being concerned about the paperwork involved, participant #3 presented another view.

I think the implementation of some kind of program for assistant principals' development needs to be done by principals. There is no one here at central office that oversees the assistant principals. They don't even meet regularly like principals do. The only way they have a line of communication with the central office or with other assistant principals is because they know someone. There is no encouragement for assistant principals to network. Assistant principals and first year principals don't have mentors and they need them. I think the best situation for implementation would be working through principals because they do the work daily. Monitoring would need to take place and it would be easiest if it were attached to the yearly evaluation and turned in to the superintendent or assistant superintendent, if evaluations are genuine.

Participants #4, #5 and #7 agreed that a training program for assistant principals should be initiated and monitored by the school system. Participant #4 commented, "I think a centralized program for assistant principals would be better than allowing principals to be responsible for it. For example, the finance officer can explain the budget much better than I can," while participant #5 thought

It might be something that they could do through their assistant principals' meetings since that is scheduled once each month already. Then different people from the central office, like the finance director, could be available for the meetings.”

Participant #7 stated,

I think an AP program needs to come from the county. I don't think it would take too much time. You do an in-service four times a year. Let APs come to the county office – that way you can pool your resources better by training them all at one time.”

Participants #1 agreed that monthly assistant principal meetings would be a “good idea.”

#### Program Organization

The majority of the principals' comments lead me to suggest that an assistant principals' training program be overseen and facilitated by the school district's central office. Reasons for a centralized program included principals not wanting to deal with paperwork (Participant #2), the simplicity of establishing a routine monthly meeting (Participant #5), and meetings being held at the district office so district officials such as the finance director could present as necessary (Participants #4 and #7).

Other reasons for not making principals solely responsible for training assistant principals for the principalship include their lack of knowledge in some areas and the personality of some principals. With respect to personalities, Participant #1 mentioned that her principal was “really stand-offish...not a very personable person.” Participant #2 commented, “I'm sure some principals withhold information because they don't want the assistant principal to outshine them. It may be an ego thing.” Participant #6 noted her lack of involvement and preparation but explained, “I don't think they [the principals she worked

with] deliberately tried to hide anything from me, I just believe this the way they had always done it and that's it.”

With respect to lack of knowledge, Participant #2 mentioned, “I think principals don't share information with assistant principals for many reasons. One is lack of knowledge. For instance, I'm not comfortable with the budget so I couldn't explain it to my assistant principal.” Participant #4 agreed that “The finance officer can explain the budget much better than I can.”

Noting each of these comments, I suggest that the superintendent or his designee be responsible for overseeing and facilitating the monthly assistant principals' training meetings. The meetings take place at a centralized location with possible off-site meetings held at schools or areas of relevance, such as the bus or maintenance office. Each meeting covers a topic described by the participants as a challenging area for first year principals and would include an activity for hands-on practice. Speakers include those who participants mentioned feeling comfortable with when asking questions, including principals (Participants #1, #2, #5, #6, #7) and colleagues in the central office (Participant #1, #2, #3 and #7). Teachers and parents are also used as speakers.

#### Schedule of Topics and Activities

Topics and activities were explained in the subsections of chapter four. This section will simply apply the organizational plan to topics using the monthly meeting format.

When an assistant principal is hired, the school system should provide an orientation, an introduction to the school system. The new hires should be introduced to the administrators and staff of the central office and told who to contact for different needs. The orientation should also include an introduction to system-wide forms, reports and computer

programs. During this introductory period, the assistant principal should be paired with a veteran principal. The principal should serve as a mentor and could be from a different grade level to expand the assistant principal's experience. All assistant principals and their mentors should communicate monthly.

There are some items that should occur at each assistant principals' meeting. These include summaries of Board of Education and Principals' meetings, any information pertaining to new or changing programs or policies, and comments from the superintendent.

Since there are ten-months in the school year and since some assistant principals are ten-month employees, there will be ten topics, one for each month's meeting. The first group of topics will focus on management and the second group of topics will focus on leadership. The assistant principals should know the topic and the speakers in advance of each meeting and prepare questions to be asked during the session. Activities will not be mentioned in detail since they were given attention in the previous chapter.

#### 1. School finance

- Trainers - District finance director, principal
- Content - The finance director speaks about the set up of budgeting in North Carolina, including the chart of accounts. He or she should also explain the school system's process by which a principal completes a budget (i.e. preparing a skeleton budget, meeting with the finance director, justifying the budget, applying a timeline, etc.). A principal, considered by the finance director to be a strong financial leader, could then explain how he or she tackles the task of preparing a budget.

- Activity – Each assistant principal interviews a principal as to how the budget process works at his or her school and prepare a budget for one budget area, such as At-Risk funds. Follow-up is provided by the finance director.

## 2. Facilities' Management

- Trainers – Director of maintenance, principals
- Contents – The trainers discuss the principal's responsibilities with respect to the school building, the process of government agency inspections, the analysis of a utility bill and suggestions for cutting costs associated with utilities, the job description of the custodian, the paperwork involved with renting out the school building, and what to look for when informally, routinely inspecting the building.
- Activity – Prepare and complete a MBWA grid to be turned in at the next meeting for evaluation and discussion.

## 3. Scheduling

- Trainers – Three principals, one from each level (elementary, middle and high school).
- Contents – Set up three breakout sessions so assistant principals have an opportunity to hear about scheduling at each level. Then let assistant principals group themselves by level and brainstorm about the activity, recording issues that must be considered.
- Activity – This activity may be explored during the summer. Elementary and middle school assistant principals prepare a mock schedule or assist the principal in developing the schedule, documenting the process. High school assistant principals work with their principals and secretaries to be actively engaged in the scheduling process. All activities are documented in a log to later serve as instructions or directions.

#### 4. District programs, policies and procedures

- Trainers – Assistant superintendents, curriculum specialists, federal programs director, and others as determined by the facilitator and assistant principals.
- Content – The trainers highlight policies and procedures from the Board of Education policy and the administrative handbook as well as any program implemented by the school system (D-Track used for discipline, SIMS for student management). Other selections may vary depending on the needs of the assistant principals. Particular subjects mentioned in the literature and interviews include any district, state and federal forms (such as attendance and discipline reports), field trip policies, textbook requisitions, and office machine servicing contracts. Other subjects may be suggested by assistant principals and principals prior to this session.
- Activity – Assistant principals develop a file or notebook from information gathered in the meeting and by interviewing principals and other school system employees that details information about policies and procedure and how their related forms are used. Examples of each are included so they may be referenced later. Assistant principals who attend staff development activities related to school system programs share information with assistant principals at future meetings.

#### 5. Personnel relations

- Trainers – Personnel director, principals, teachers
- Content – The personnel director shares tips for dealing with teachers who are not performing at an appropriate level of success and describes any process used by the school system when dealing with personnel. The principals, who are selected because of

their strong personnel relation skills, describe ways to handle difficult situations, noting particular examples. Assistant principals discuss vignettes pertaining to personnel relations. Teachers share what they expect from a principal within the scope of personnel relations – their likes and dislikes. (Participant #7 mentioned the importance of listening to teachers.)

- Activity – Distribute a survey or questionnaire to the faculty and staff of the school to determine their perception of your strengths and weaknesses when dealing with personnel. Keep a journal of problems, interventions and outcomes. Distribute the survey or questionnaire again at the end of the year and note changes. Share the findings with assistant principals during small group discussion at a future meeting.

#### 6. Customer Service

- Trainers – Facilitator or other person appointed by the facilitator, parent(s)
- Content - This topic would be a good choice for a Paideia seminar as there are many books available that focus on customer service such as *Customer Service for Dummies* by Leland and Bailey, *Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service* by Eisner and *Monitoring, Measuring and Managing Customer Service* by Goodman. In addition to the seminar, parents are asked to speak to assistant principals about their expectations for customer service.
- Activity – Assistant principals use a customer service audit, inspecting the building and questioning staff, parents and students about their opinions of customer service, then meet with the School Improvement Team to address findings. The findings and

outcomes of the surveys are documented in the assistant principals' journals or portfolios and shared at a future assistant principals' meeting.

#### 7. Decision making

- Trainers – Facilitator, principals
- Content – Vignettes are discussed in small groups to practice the steps of ethical decision making. Principals share situations related to difficult decisions that had to be made and after discussion among assistant principals, share the decision and the outcome.
- Activity – Decision making is a topic that requires practice. Assistant principals use their journals for reflection by exploring their use of the five steps of ethical decision making. At future meetings, in small group discussion, assistant principals share one decision that had to be made and how they chose to handle it. This time also gives assistant principals an opportunity to discuss difficult decisions they are currently facing and ask for input.

#### 8. School improvement planning

- Trainers – Principals, teachers
- Contents – Principals, who exhibit the school improvement planning process as a strength, share their school improvement plans with assistant principals. They share minutes from school improvement team meetings and a time line for writing their school improvement plan. They also describe their experiences in preparing Title I plans, technology plans, etc. Principals explain how they develop a trusting relationship with teachers and teachers discuss what principals can do to strengthen that trust.
- Activity – Assistant principals serve as the chair for the School Improvement Team and develop a school improvement notebook. The notebook contains their reflections about

the school improvement process, minutes from meetings, and copies of the various school plans mentioned in the content section.

#### 9. Curriculum and instruction

- Trainers – Curriculum supervisors, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, federal programs' director, exceptional children's director, testing director, principals
- Content – An overview is provided of what instructional programs are implemented throughout the school system such as Accelerated Reader, High Schools that Work, and HOSTS (Helping One Student To Succeed – a mentoring program). An overview of federal and state programs related to curriculum is provided, including Title I, No Child Left Behind, the Exceptional Children's program, and North Carolina's testing program. Samples of forms that are used for these programs are reviewed. Principals comment on how they monitor curriculum and instruction at their schools.
- Activity – Often, principals are viewed as the instructional leaders and therefore review lesson plans. Assistant principals take the opportunity to review lesson plans to have a knowledge of what teachers are teaching then compare these objectives to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Assistant principal apply the MBWA grid to instruction as they wander around the school. Record reflections from team planning meetings.

#### 10. Professional development

- Trainers – Personnel director, assistant superintendent, principals

- Contents – Paideia seminars, incorporating up-to-date educational literature, take place at each session. In addition, time is scheduled at each session to discuss upcoming professional development activities and to let principals and assistant principals present what they have learned at seminars and workshops with the group.
- Activity – Use presentation software (such as PowerPoint) to share information from professional development activities with assistant principals at meetings. Use a word processing package to develop handouts. Develop an professional growth plan (required by many school systems) and a portfolio, including a personal mission statement, long and short term goals, and artifacts, to reflect on personal and professional growth. Assistant principals share the portfolios with the superintendent or his designee during yearly evaluations.

#### Limitations of the Program

The program for utilizing the assistant principalship as a training ground for the principalship faces limitations including the focus on literature, the interpretation of the program, the size of school districts, the demographics of the assistant principal, the scheduling of the meeting and the support provided by the district.

The information was presented with more focus on topics and less attention to detail so the program can be tailored to fit each school system and group of assistant principals. Since my superintendent wanted to know how he could better help new principals feel prepared when entering the principalship, I focused on determining the areas in which they did not feel prepared. I did not give as much attention to the literature for these topics or the

details of the activities. Many superintendents and district supervisors will have their own choice of information to share and activities they would like assistant principals to complete.

My approach may present problems in that facilitators of meetings may not implement the program in a way that is beneficial to assistant principals. I assume that the superintendent or his designee is capable and willing to determine what specific information and literature to share with assistant principals. Without specific guidelines, this may not be accomplished as I, or the superintendent, had hoped. Also, there are few ideas for follow-up mentioned. It is expected that the superintendent or his designee will determine how activities will be assessed or discussed to make them worthwhile and meaningful. Suggestions are mentioned only briefly.

The entire set-up of the implementation is based on the assumption that the number of assistant principals in the system is manageable when dealing with monthly sessions and activities. Some systems are too large and may need to be divided by districts. Some school systems are very small (four or five schools) and may not have enough assistant principals to make discussions and seminars effective.

The demographics of the assistant principals are also very important factors in the design on the program. The program is designed for new assistant principals, or those who have not been exposed to the topics mentioned, who desire to obtain a principalship. Some assistant principals may have served many years as administrators and plan to be career assistant principals. Other may have experience with certain topics and may not need additional exposure. These factors should be taken into consideration when designing the program for each individual school system.

Scheduling may also be a limitation. In my district the superintendent prefers that principals and assistant principals not be away from campus at the same time. With administrators being involved in so many meetings (as mentioned by Participants #1 and #7), it may be difficult to find a time that all assistant principals can meet.

Finally, my superintendent showed an interest in preparing assistant principals for the principalship by requesting that this research be conducted. I feel sure that my findings and suggestions will be considered very seriously. However, as discussed in chapter two, there are many leadership styles and personalities among administrators. Some superintendents may not see the program as a priority or may not feel that they have the manpower to make the program a success. Without the proper support, monitoring and supervision, the program may not achieve its objectives.

#### Ideas for Future Research

My research was designed to determine the areas of challenge for new principals and suggest activities that allowed assistant principals to practice or *do* leadership. In conducting the research, other topics came to my attention that may serve as future research topics.

These topics include:

- What follow-up, if any, exists between Master of School Administration graduates and their universities? How do universities know if they are preparing students well to assume the assistant principalship?
- Has the implementation of business and industry programs, such as Total Quality Management, been successful in schools? How are such programs tailored to *fit* education?

- What is the outcome of the implementation of this program to prepare assistant principals for the principalship? Do assistant principals who participate in the program feel better prepared as new principals than those interviewed for this study?

### Conclusion

The purpose of my research centered on four research questions. I will conclude by reviewing these questions and my findings for each.

1. What bodies of knowledge are assistant principals exposed to in Master of School Administration programs? (What do assistant principals bring to the position? What information has been presented to them and what skills have been developed?)

General categories of study found in four Master of School Administration programs in North Carolina include instructional leadership, managerial leadership, law and policies and societal awareness. Master of School Administration programs also include a year-long internships, giving students an opportunity to get hands-on experience as an administrator while completing projects such as organizational analyses, Master's theses, portfolios, inquiry projects and studies of local school districts. Specific topics include decision making, communication, quality learning, visionary leadership, managerial skills, law and politics of education, the planning and organizational development process, research methodology, problem solving, social issues, supervising teachers, budgeting, cultural sensitivity, collaboration and resource management.

2. What skill/tasks are typically associated with the assistant principalship? (Do assistant principals get to apply the knowledge they were exposed to and the skills they developed in Master of School Administration programs? How much of a connection exists between the two?)

Based on participants' comments, the common skills and tasks typically associated with the assistant principalship included discipline, classroom observations, pacing guides, discipline and payroll associated with buses, hall duty, overseeing programs and serving on committees. Some of the participants mentioned participation in curriculum and instruction issues, school improvement planning and the budget. The coursework of the Master of School Administration programs did not involve buses, doing payroll or overseeing particular programs. It did involve areas, such as budgeting and resource management, that assistant principals did not consistently have opportunities to practice. The connection between the two (the skills/tasks learned in the Master of School Administration program and those applied during the assistant principalship) appeared to be dependent upon the leadership style and personality of the principal and the assertiveness of the assistant principal to ask for responsibilities.

3. What skills/tasks should an administrator obtain/master to make their first year as a principal more successful? (Are these skills/tasks that assistant principals get to practice? Why or why not?)

Skills and tasks fall into two categories: management and leadership. Management topics include budget and finance, facilities' management, organizational issues (scheduling and understanding the school system's programs, policies and procedures), personnel relations and customer service. Leadership topics include decision making, school improvement planning, curriculum and instruction (testing and accountability, exceptional children and instructional programs) and professional development (current topics and technology). Again, the amount of practice in these areas noted by participants varied

according to the principals' expectations and leadership styles and the participants' initiative to ask for practice in the areas.

4. How can the assistant principalship be redesigned to better prepare assistant principals for the principalship? (How can needed knowledge best be shared with assistant principals? How can assistant principals best be trained to master the skills/tasks needed for the principalship?)

Some participants noted that they received their best experience from simply doing things. Therefore, assistant principals should be involved in activities that allow them to practice the areas that challenged the participants as first year principals. The participants felt that the activities should be coordinated and monitored by the school system's central office through monthly assistant principals' meetings. The activities include the preparation of notebooks containing information for use as a principal, reflection through the use of a journal and portfolio, group discussions, preparation of schedules, mock budgets, and presentations (developed using technology) shared with other administrators.

It is my hope that the suggestions made will flourish into a program in my school district that will utilize the assistant principalship as a training ground for the principalship. In doing so, I hope it produced principals who are better prepared to assume the principalship...better prepared to serve our children...because "Schools are for the learner. We, who call ourselves educators, must always hold on to this as the center of our vision" (Huff, 1997, p.56).

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## Appendix A – Analysis of the MSA Programs of Four Universities in North Carolina

East Carolina University's program divides course work into seven guidelines.

- Strategic leadership – focuses on retrieving, evaluating and synthesizing research to solve problems and make decisions then communicating about those and other current educational issues through oral, written and multimedia modes.
- Instructional leadership – provides students with information about quality learning, school-based visionary leadership and curriculum and instruction.
- Managerial skills – centered on the elements of school quality that impact program operations and relationships of schools with other agencies.
- Political leadership – focuses on the law, policy and politics of education.
- Organizational leadership – provides insight into the core value of society and a school's need to be sensitive to societal dimensions as well as the application of the planning and organizational development process.
- Internship – A significant, year-long, full time internship. Students are held to the same standards of conduct as other employees. They should establish professional relationship with administrators and faculty, become familiar with local school board policy, and maintain a professional appearance. Students are evaluated based on their portfolio and by the evaluation instrument for administrator of their host school(s).
- Individual minor

Students at Fayetteville State University take two elective courses, three sections of internship (15 credit hours) and seven core courses. Students study:

- factors relating to human behaviors within an organization

- development of leadership skills to deal with groups exhibiting various behaviors
- research methodology in grounded in problem solving
- research technique and design
- applications of statistical methods
- legal and policy professional issues
- social issues which impact the school environment
- educational finance, including preparing budget, accounting procedures and financial law
- literature and research related to cognitive development theories of learning and their impact on curriculum planning and classroom instruction
- school based management and computer based management systems.

The purposes of Fayetteville State University's internship in school administration are for the intern to:

- become familiar with the administrative tasks at his/her site
- collect data and do a needs assessment for action research
- plan, design and document their experiences
- attend seminars and workshops related to issues in school administration and educational leadership.

Interns maintain a daily log which document observations, shadowing experiences, individual research and written clinical experience reports. In addition to completing an action research project, interns select, read and summarize three current educational leadership books and attend seminars and workshops.

Eight courses make up the twenty-four hours of required courses at North Carolina State University. Courses focus on:

- social, cultural, political and policy environment of schools and the theories of change
- application of moral theories and reasoning to problems involving educational policy
- logic underlying approaches to problem definition and solution, and the tools of investigation
- school organization theories and domains of leadership.
- theory and research of supervising pre-service and in-service teachers.

Managerial foci include:

- subcultural influences on public school performances and the factors of equality, social stratification and mobility
- purpose, and design and policies of school budgets
- planning, management and evaluation of programs, information systems, student behavior systems and school security systems.

Seminars are integrated into the 18 credit hour internship at North Carolina State University and include topics such as educational law, parent-community relationships, technology applications as well as management issues such as scheduling.

North Carolina State University's internship is designed to develop:

- observation skills
- the ability to record relevant observations by means of written journals

- skills necessary to analyze experiences by identifying events and consequences in order to develop alternate courses of action.

The requirements for the internship include special projects and activities assigned by the mentor administrator, a log of activities and events, reflective and seminar journals, a 10-15 page paper based on a school related issue and a plan of work that includes topics such as buildings and grounds, discipline, child nutrition, budgets, personnel evaluation, school improvement plan, special education, transportation, hiring, and instructional leadership.

Students at The University of North Carolina at Wilmington must complete nine courses, twelve hours of internship, a performance portfolio and a master's thesis. The courses focus on:

- program evaluation
- analysis of human behavior in schools
- formation of school level policy
- field-based and scholarly inquiry
- reflective practice
- cultural sensitivity
- collaboration
- awareness of the world of ideas
- clarification of the personal belief structure
- human resource skill areas including planning, personnel development, resource management
- leadership development

- instructional improvement
- communication
- research competencies for designing, conducting and interpreting research of educational decisions
- and conceptual and analytic tools used to design and evaluate classroom instruction and school-wide reform efforts.

The internship is designed to provide opportunities to apply ideas presented in other courses to “real world” experiences. Each intern is responsible for developing an organizational analysis (school profile) of the host school, focusing on six areas that correspond to Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards. These areas include school vision, school culture and instructional programs, management of organization, collaboration with families and the community, ethical behavior, and involvement within the political, social, legal and cultural contexts. Interns also strive to develop an understanding of school planning, resources, personnel, technical skills and effective interpersonal relationships.

Appendix B – Participant Letter

June 13, 2002

Dear (Name),

I hope things are going well for you at (Name of School) as you are closing out another school year. The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance. I am working on my dissertation for my doctoral program at North Carolina State University. The focus of my study is utilizing the assistant principalship as a training ground for the principalship. To gather data, I would like to interview administrators completing their first or second year in the principalship. The interviews are designed to be informal – a time for you to reflect on your experiences as both an assistant principal and a principal.

As an administrator, I am aware of how busy you are and realize that your time is valuable. I plan to conduct my interviews during June and July, when your days are less hectic due to the absence of teachers and students. To minimize your time involved, I will travel to your school. The interview should take no more than one hour.

All information will be confidential as pseudonyms will be used in my dissertation. I hope the findings will be valuable not just to myself, but to fellow administrators. I will gladly share my final product with you if you would like.

This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of North Carolina State University (IRB). The IRB may be contacted by writing:

North Carolina State University  
Box 7514  
Raleigh, North Carolina

I will be calling in the next few days to answer any questions you may have and to make an appointment with you to conduct the interview. If you do not feel that you can participate, please feel free to let me know. I will certainly understand. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Wendy Royal

## Appendix C – Interview Outline

- I. Personal information – years of experience, positions held, education, etc.
- II. The Assistant Principalship
  - A. Describe your assistant principalship(s) – the school and its faculty, the principal and teachers, your duties and responsibilities, daily schedule, etc.
  - B. How did your Master of School Administration program prepare you to complete the tasks for which you were responsible? Were there things for which you felt unprepared? Were there things that you had been prepared for that you did not have an opportunity to do? What would have been a good way for your principal to give you experiences in those areas?
  - C. Describe your relationship with your principal(s), both personal and professional. Did you let him/her know your learning needs, requesting different tasks? Was there a discussion during your interview about the assistant principal's position at the school and what your responsibilities would be? If there is anything you could change about your experiences as an assistant principal, what would it be?
- III. The Principalship
  - A. Tell me about your principalship – the school and its faculty, your relationship with the assistant principals and teachers, duties and responsibilities, daily schedule and transition to the position.
  - B. What are some of the things you are responsible for as a principal that you had little responsibility for or practice in dealing within as an assistant principal?

Where did you get help? How could you have been prepared (as an assistant principal) to assume these responsibilities?

- C. Describe your relationship (professional and personal) with your assistant principal. Is he/she assertive in defining his/her learning needs? What do you do to insure that your assistant principal gets the experience she needs to be a successful principal?

## Appendix D – Interview transcripts

### Interview #1

I taught for two years as a middle school math teacher and then taught four years in grades two thru five. I then took a two-year leave of absence to enter a Master of School Administration program as a Principal Fellow. After graduation, I served for one year at a middle school as a half-time assistant principal, half-time AIG teacher. The next year I came to this school as the assistant principal. One year later, I was named as principal and I just finished my first year in that position. We are a small school system with only five schools. This school serves approximately 650 students in grades three thru five.

The faculty was very receptive and supportive and the principal at that point had decided he was on his way out so he let me do everything. I did all of the classroom observations and all of the discipline. He took care of the buses which is unusual and something I have done very little with as a principal. I am actually learning from my assistant principal how to do them. I did all of the classroom observations. He did the summatives at the end but I did all of the formative ones. Budget here is done differently. They give you the category and the breakdown of how you can spend it and how much you've got and that's all we have to do – we don't really have to turn anything in.

I was here at 7:30am and had duty out front being visible and greeting the children. From there, the principal and I both went into the cafeteria to finish out breakfast duty. Then, if there was a lot of bus discipline, if lots of kids were outside waiting, we would split that up. From that point on, probably after 9:30 to 10:00am, I was pretty much in the classroom the rest of the day, which was good. We had pacing guides that year for the first year so I was responsible for getting those together and making sure the benchmark

assessments were done and scored – I collected all the data for that, then distributed the information to the teachers. I was pretty much responsible for everything dealing with curriculum that year, which was a big help when I became the principal. In the afternoons, if I came back in and there were a lot of kids in here I helped with discipline again. Basically, I was out in the classrooms all day.

The internship component of my MSA [Master of School Administration] program was most helpful because I did my internship in this system so I pretty much knew the ins and outs of how things worked when I got my job. I knew the set-up of the school and everything so the biggest help was being able to work in the same system as I did my internship. But as far as the classes go, they didn't really help. There were things that I didn't feel prepared for as an AP, like buses. I did it for one month just to see that I could do it but I had no idea how to do bus payroll. My concerns were mostly logistical kinds of things – things you can learn easily but you just have to be shown how to do them. If you had never done them before, you had no clue. There wasn't anything that I felt prepared to do or expected to do that he didn't let me do. He let me do everything because like I said, he knew he was leaving and even though he didn't tell me until the end of the year, the superintendent had told me that my job here was to act as the principal. I think if there was something I didn't get a chance to do and wanted to, I just needed to tell him and he would have been receptive to letting me do it or at least watch him do it.

When I first came here, he was really stand-offish. I felt like it was because he did not interview me but was told by the superintendent that I was going to be his assistant principal. By the end of the second month things had gotten a lot better. I had built some trust and he knew that I would do whatever he asked me do. By Christmas we were to the

point that he would come in to my office, shut the door, and we would sit down and chat. I discovered that he's not a very personable person anyway so I wasn't really put off by his behavior. Outside of school, we had no personal or social relationship – it was just here.

As far as experience goes, I told him what I wanted to learn. I told him I would like to see budget and any kind of legal issues, those kinds of things. I pretty much knew what to expect from the job because the position was pretty much spelled out to me in my interview but it was spelled out by the superintendent. If I could change something, there would have been more input from the principal as to my being hired prior to my coming here as opposed to simply being placed here.

It was an interesting situation when I got the job. The faculty did not want me to be the principal. They didn't complain about the job I did as the assistant principal but they thought I was too young and inexperienced to be able to handle being a principal and they were concerned about having a female as a leader. They also didn't like the fact that the superintendent promoted me as he was leaving his job. Other people in the school system felt the same way but things turned out fine and I was voted administrator of the year by the other principals. Things are better at the school now, too. The faculty is supportive and we have a good relationship. I think the main reason for the turn-around is the fact that I have stressed site-based management so they feel involved. On our end-of-year survey every teacher and assistant checked that they felt like they had input in critical decisions regarding the school. When I pulled ones from the last three years that was not the case.

My assistant principal and I get along really well. She, like me, was placed here. I didn't get to interview her but was told she was being relocated from the high school. That was fine. She had been here as the assistant principal prior to my coming here so she was

only at the high school for one year. She is wonderful and very knowledgeable. She handles children and teachers well and treats everyone fairly so we get along really well.

There isn't really a typical day now. When my husband is home to take my daughter to day care I'm here by 6:30am and I have to pick her up by 5:30pm so at 5:25pm I'm rushing out the door to pick her up from day care. If it weren't for that, I could be here until eight or nine o'clock easy. It's been a big change because I thought I would still be able to be out and in the classrooms a lot but that was hard to do. That's something I want to focus on for next year – setting aside some time everyday to be out of this office and in those classrooms. I do lots of PR [public relations] stuff – more of that than I thought. Lots of parents coming in and just wanting to chat and share. There are also lots of meetings. My husband says if we got paid overtime that we might get what we're worth. I guess the biggest things I do are PR and paperwork. But I still try to stick to my schedule. I try to be out front by 8:00am, then I go to the cafeteria, then back in here by 8:30am to do announcements. Other than that, it's just whatever the day brings.

The biggest things I feel a sense of responsibility for are teacher evaluations, testing and accountability, systematic kinds of things like maintenance – making sure the building is clean and checking behind your custodians. Lots of management kinds of things. Those are the types of things I didn't get to do as an AP [Assistant Principal] – management and upkeep of the facility. When other things came up that I wasn't sure about how to do I called the other principals. I would call the principal at the primary school [which feeds this school] and at the middle school, the one I did my internship with. Basically, I depended on these the most. I also called our curriculum coordinator at the central office – she's really good to work with. And I called my superintendent anytime I needed anything.

There isn't anything currently in place at the county level to prepare assistant principals for the principalship. When I was an assistant principal we had monthly AP meetings. When I had my evaluation meeting last week, the superintendent asked what he could do to help administrators. I told him I thought it would be a good idea to start having monthly AP meetings again. When we met monthly, we read up-to-date literature and book reviews and discussed them and that helped a lot. My AP and I do that now. I will buy two copies of a book and we'll read it and then talk about it. She has come to me and told me that she needed some exposure to budget so I've shown her the process we use here which, as I said, seems to be different than other places. It helps that she is assertive. If there is something she doesn't know and wants to know, she asks.

I think it would be wonderful if my superintendent gave me a program or process to use to help my assistant principal prepare to be a principal. I look forward to seeing the final product. The things I think you need to focus on are budget; also, curriculum issues like observations, attending all the curriculum training that goes on in the school, especially if it's a new program. Another big thing is customer service – how to deal with the community and the parents. That's going to be our superintendent's big focus for next year for the administrators.

#### Interview #2

I am beginning my 12<sup>th</sup> year in education. I Graduated from UNCW [The University of North Carolina at Wilmington] with a degree in special education – BED [Behaviorally and Emotionally Disabled] certification. I taught one year in pre-school EMD [Educable Mentally Disabled] class and was going back to school to add EMD certification. The second year taught K-2 EMD/BED children. The third year I went to a new school in

the same system to be closer to home and taught K-2 BED. The next year they were going to add fourth thru sixth grades to my classroom and double my class size so I came back to the county I lived in. I taught EMD/cross-categorical children there for three full years and was starting my fourth year when I found out I had been accepted into the Principal Fellows Program. When I graduated, I was able to work in the county I first worked in as an AP at a year round elementary school. In October of the second year, I came back to my home county to be the principal at this elementary school. So, I just finished my second year in the principalship, even though my first year wasn't a full one.

We had around 200 students and I was the full-time AP [Assistant Principal]. At the time I thought I had a lot to do but leaving that situation and coming here I realize how much time I could have had if I had managed it well. I had a wonderful principal – he was my assistant principal during my first year of teaching. He had a good personality and gave me a lot of responsibility and shared things with me. The school was in a poverty-stricken area. We had good parents who wanted to support but didn't know how to do it. Because we were year round a few kids came who were out of our district but not many, probably because of the population we served. We had good kids and not many discipline problems.

My responsibilities were the typical things but we shared. We evenly divided up teacher evaluations. During the first semester, I took half of the faculty and he took the other half, then we switched at mid-year so each of us had an opportunity to work with all teachers. He was good about giving me responsibility and asking for my input. He would listen to me and I would listen to him. He would come to me with a situation, listen to my suggestion and then tell me to do it. Since we were year round, we had remediation during intercessions. He would bring the remediation budget to me and tell me it was totally mine.

That was helpful because it was the first time I had worked with any kind of budget. I had to make sure my money would last for all four intercessions and line up personnel.

In my school system, assistant principals were responsible for testing. I went to all the meetings and I had to make sure I understood exactly how everything was done. I set it up so that mock-tests were just like the EOG. Children went to the same classrooms and were given the same modifications. It made EOG run smoothly and it helped me be more organized. Assistant principals were also responsible for all Initially Licensed Teachers [ILTs] so I went to all of those meetings, then came back and shared with the faculty and particularly ILTs and mentors.

I'm sure discipline should have been a big part of my daily schedule but we didn't have many discipline problems and the principal and I shared the discipline. It wasn't a matter of me being the assistant principal, it was a matter of who was available. I tried to have a schedule that I followed every day but looking back, I didn't do a good job of managing my time. I was working so hard to learn my job that I wasn't as efficient as I would be if I were there now. I just wanted everything to be perfect and as a result, I took too much time to do some things. One thing that took lots of time was buses. My principal shared that responsibility with me but I put payroll in every month. We did that on the AS-400 [a computer system] so it took me a while to get used to that. For a while, I had to pull the manual out every month because it wasn't something that I did every day.

I feel like my MSA [Master of School Administration] program did a good job preparing me for my assistant principalship. The only thing it didn't prepare me for was something I needed not as an assistant principal but as a principal, the budget. Even when I was taking my finance class, I knew I wasn't being taught what I should have been. Our big

assignment was to take one area of a system's budget and realign it to save money. I did the Exceptional Children's budget for a small school system and that's about all I learned. I never learned how you could transfer money to get things done at your school – stuff I should know how to do to be efficient with my funds. Other than that, my MSA program, especially the internship, prepared me well. Since I did rotations during my internship, I would have felt comfortable going to any level school even though I had only taught elementary.

My principal interviewed and hired me. He told me in my interview what he expected me to do as his assistant principal and was pretty true to what he said. If there was one thing I could change about my assistant principalship it wouldn't be the experience, it would be my behavior. I wish I had exhibited more self-confidence. I think that would have allowed me to save time or get more done in less time. I always spent a great deal of time making decisions like suspensions. I thought I was doing the right thing but I “hemmed and hawed” about it.

This school is full of strong teachers, supportive parents and great kids. Almost all of the teachers that work here live in this community and are very invested in making it a good place. The faculty ranges in experience from ILTs to those with over 30 years. I think I have a good relationship with the faculty. Many of them think of me as being more than the principal and they share personal information with me. That is probably true more of teachers than teacher assistants because they are in the office more.

I did make some changes this year, or rather I brought some things to light, that some of them didn't like so it caused a division between me and them. I had to let them know that classroom discipline was their job and that we needed to have a school-wide discipline

policy. They didn't like it but it's getting better. Another issue is the School Improvement Team. It has not been very effective because the members say they can't speak for their co-workers. I'm working on changing the make-up of that committee because I feel that it is an important one.

The biggest responsibility that I have now that I was not ready for is the budget. It is very different here than in the other place I worked. I am told in detail what I can spend and how I can spend it. I think other principals are more knowledgeable about moving money around so they get more of what they want. I don't know enough about it to dispute what the finance officer tells me. I just try to maintain a good relationship with her so she will assist me in doing the things I want to do here. When we meet, she calls out line items and I want to be able to do that. I told the superintendent that budget was going to be my focus for this year.

When I have questions about budget or other things, I have no problem getting help. I feel like I get lots of support. I have a mentor at the county office who is a former principal and I call her or the appropriate person at the county office if I have a question that relates to one of their areas. If it is a school question or one less important, I call other principals in the system.

I don't have an assistant principal here but I think it is good for the two administrators to have a good, trusting relationship. I think principals don't share information with assistant principals for many reasons. One is lack of knowledge. For instance, I'm not comfortable with the budget so I couldn't explain it to my assistant principal. I think assistant principals who work for principals who really know their stuff have an advantage and get better

preparation. I'm sure some principals withhold information because they don't want the assistant principal to outshine them – it may be an ego thing.

Time is also a factor in how much a principal and assistant principal share. I think the two should have a chance to sit down on a regular basis to discuss things. At least once each week, a scheduled, uninterrupted time should be set so they can share information from the principals' meeting or central office, events happening at the school, issues with students, parents and teachers that have transpired and other things. As an assistant principal, if people came to me with concerns, I shared them with the principal. Lots of times he was the subject of the concerns and I thought he needed to know so he could see it coming. Being up-front and honest is important.

The principal and assistant principal should share observations, buses, discipline – everything – because it is too consuming for the AP to do alone. Without help, she would never get to be involved with curriculum and instruction and other things. The principal and assistant principal should take time to make it very clear who will do what. They should both be responsible to a certain extent but they need to decide who will ultimately report on what.

I think the areas that need to be addressed are:

- Budgeting
- testing – general knowledge about the growth formula, modifications
- exceptional children – paperwork, the placement process, IEP [Individual Education Plan] meetings

- curriculum and instruction – familiarity with the Standard Course of Study at all grade levels to give them credibility when talking to teachers and parents
- personnel – participating in interviews, knowing the process of hiring an employee with respect to school system procedures
- monthly assistant principal meetings – makes an AP feel part of the system; incorporate socratic seminars related to monthly readings; information about policies and procedures; break out sessions dealing with technical things, presented by principals.

The implementation would be the tricky part. It would depend on the documentation. If it was easy to do and went along with the assistant principal's evaluation, I would be willing to do it because it would kill two birds with one stone. If there was lots of paperwork associated with it, I would say to give it to someone in the central office because it's not benefiting me as a principal. Some would say that my principal didn't do it for me so why should I do it for them? I can see a problem if the principal and assistant principal do not work together well. The principal could make up information or not implement the program well and the AP would not benefit.

### Interview #3

I was a bus driver for a year and a teacher assistant for two and one-half years before becoming a teacher. I taught for seven years – kindergarten for three years and first grade for four years. During that time I went to graduate school and got a Master's of Education with a concentration in reading. At the end of my seventh year I took a leave of absence to get a Master of School Administration as a Principal Fellow. When I graduated, I became the assistant principal at this school. Two years later, I was named as the principal here.

My school is in a rural community. There were about 510 kids here when I came. Most teachers have been here – they started teaching here and many are retiring here. They are a tight and closed faculty. The perception in the community is that they are difficult because they have been allowed to do what they wanted to do for so long. There is also a perception that because they do things their way, they don't listen to parents and are somewhat non-caring. We don't have many Initially Licensed Teachers and we have little turnover.

The principal was very easy going. He didn't like confrontation. He tried to keep teachers happy and make them feel appreciated. He did a lot of duties himself so teachers didn't have to do them. He was very visible and the students loved him. The teachers probably did too, because he allowed them to do their own thing. The duties he assigned me as the assistant principal were essentially discipline and buses. There was also morning duty, where I watched the entire student population as they unloaded buses and congregated in the field on the side of the school. I was in the cafeteria for all three lunches and back outside in the afternoons for bus and car duty.

My MSA [Master of School Administration] program didn't really prepare me for the assistant principalship or the principalship. I would have liked to have had more exposure to law. There have been times that I would have liked to have been able to cite things easily but I always had to go to the book and look and it up. Then I had to ask someone to interpret what I was reading. I think I was able to do most things handed to me as an assistant principal with little trouble. The thing that stumped me the most was Title I because I wasn't familiar with the requirements and meeting the letter of the law. I didn't know how to write up the Title I plan and tie it in to the vision of the school. I think I got the best experience I

could by just doing things. When there were things to do, he just told me to do them. I asked questions, read books and did what I had to do to get the job done. It was indoctrination by fire.

As I became the principal, the school changed. A new school was built in this system so half of my students and almost half of the teachers were reassigned there. In essence, this was a new school this year – a new principal, a new assistant principal and a new faculty. The faculty had a hard time seeing themselves as being new but were by Title I standards and by testing standards. My perception of the faculty is that they are still difficult to deal with. They are at 28 or 29 years of service and they are not changing. They have their way but I continue to talk to them again and again, trying to get them to see a different point of view. I just try to work with them and I keep praying for retirement. I talk to them about the community's perception of the teachers here. It's negative and that's not what we want it to be. We want to it change so we've been talking about what we want the perception to be, what we want people to think about us and what we are doing in the school and how we make this change with students and parents. Slowly, I think we are getting there. I think my biggest task from the superintendent was to come in and build some collegiality, common ground and mutual respect. My evaluation showed that I did that.

My assistant principal was placed here by the superintendent. Even though I didn't pick her myself, we have a wonderful relationship. We were able to go into each other's offices and sit and talk about things very openly and honestly. We thought through things together and did that very well. We were a united team – neither the faculty nor the students were able to put one of us against the other. I supported her and she supported me. It was a good thing but now she is gone. They have placed her at the high school for next year.

Of course, there is no set daily schedule for a principal but there are things I try to do every day. In the morning students go to the gym and sit by grade level until the school day begins. I try to be in there every morning. Then I come back in here, do announcements and meet with parents. Many of them bring their children to school and stay to talk and see me about issues. I try to walk around during Reading Renaissance time then be in the office after lunch because it seems like that's when teachers call us to their room most often for discipline problems.

I am responsible for everything now that I wasn't responsible for as an assistant principal. The role changes significantly. When I was an assistant principal I wondered, "How much different can it be?" I felt like I was already doing everything. When I got the principal's position, my teachers commented that it couldn't be any worse because I was already doing it all. But, it is so much more simply because it all rests with you. If there is a problem or the superintendent has an issue, it comes to you. I find myself trying to be proactive and think things out. I make sure I consider all the consequences of a decision so for me, it's a lot of mental energy. Running the school takes a lot of planning, a lot of thinking and a lot of talking. It consumes me.

I don't like confrontation so I want to try to avoid it by thinking through all the possibilities. By the end of the school day, I'm exhausted and the day isn't over yet. I try to make sure that I'm at all of the students' activities or that the assistant principal is there so I end up driving to the other end of the county or to the county beside us for games and things. There are also many after school activities and I feel like one of us needs to be here as long as a student is here. Then there are dances and other evening activities. Since I live in another city, I usually stay over so some days I'm here from 6:45am until 10:30pm. I didn't

do that as much as an assistant principal because I took the lead of the principal and often he would say that we didn't need to attend an activity. I just feel responsible for these children regardless of the time of day.

When I became a principal, there were little things that I didn't know how to do but most of them were technical things. One was learning to set up the budget the way this county does it, coding items and making sure you're spending money on the right types of things. I referred to budgets from past years to answer some of those questions. The bookkeeper is good about keeping things in order but the whole process still drives me crazy. You have to do everything a certain way and you can't just buy something that you need for the school if you see it in a store at a good price because the auditors will be checking. I hate purchase orders. I was exposed to budget some because I did Title I but it has taken all of this year to get comfortable with the process and the paperwork.

When I had a question with budget or something else, I would call central office and ask a supervisor, one of the ones I could trust. There are about four people there that I would call on for help. I think I would have fewer questions if my principal had taken more time to go over things with me. We could have done things together but it's a different situation when you have to do things yourself. Doing it together and then being able to immediately practice it on your own, then continuing to practice it might be a good method of learning. There are so many things that you do at the beginning of the year and don't do again until the beginning of the next year, so you will forget. You need practice on a regular basis.

My assistant principal had already been in the position for a while so she already knew what to do. She knew the computer programs we use, our Student Information Management System (SIMS) and other things. She was our Athletic Director, so she was

getting some experience with budget by handling the athletic budget. She didn't ask much about the school budget. I think I can prepare the assistant principal that will be coming here for a principalship by including her in everything. That will give her an opportunity to see how things work. She's got to see it and be a part of it in order to learn it. So, as I'm doing things, I'll share them with her. That's the way it worked with the other assistant principal. We did almost everything together. We were almost like co-principals in a sense.

Something other than budget that assistant principals need exposure to is the whole process of school improvement planning. We have a Title I Plan, a School Improvement Plan, and Safe School Plan, a Limited English Proficiency Plan and others. As a principal, you have to get input to put those together. So the assistant principal needs to practicing being a facilitator – learning to include others and to delegate. Principals have to delegate and make sure things are getting done so when the final product is ready to be turned in, it is a good product. You get practice with parents as an assistant principal, you just have to learn diplomacy. Nothing prepares you for dealing with personnel because that is one area that always falls back on the principal. Adults are worse than kids for making a big deal of petty issues and abusing privileges. You hire someone to do a job and you expect them to do it. For example, having to write a letter to a teacher because he is retiring and is trying to use up the sick days that he is not going to get paid for is unprofessional and ridiculous. You have to know the games that people play and be one step ahead of them.

I think the implementation of some kind of program for assistant principals' development needs to be done by principals. There is no one here at central office that oversees the assistant principals. They don't even meet regularly like principals do. The only way they have a line of communication with the central office or with other assistant

principals is because they know someone. There is no encouragement for assistant principals to network. Assistant principals and first year principals don't have mentors and they need them. I think the best situation for implementation would be working through principals because they do the work daily. Monitoring would need to take place and it would be easiest if it were attached to the yearly evaluation and turned in to the superintendent or assistant superintendent, if evaluations are genuine. When I had mine this year I went in with my stack of evidence and the superintendent never looked at it. He knew what he was going to say. We talked and then he went over to his computer, typed it up and gave me a copy.

#### Interview #4

I taught for 18 years in a regular classroom. I taught 4th and 5th grade, was a reading specialist and taught high school students in summer programs. I never had experience with children this age [Pre-kindergarten through 2nd grade] except at church. I was an assistant principal for nine years, five years at the middle school and four years at this school. I have been the principal here for one year.

I started as an assistant principal at a middle school which implemented the middle school concept. We had an excellent faculty. They were hard workers who liked working with children that age level. They were very supportive - just a good faculty. The same thing was true when I came here - a good faculty, outstanding teachers, very supportive, very involved with the students. Since we are a small system, I served the exact same population at the middle school that I do now. It is about 52% minority and 48% white.

There was never a dull moment at the middle school. You never knew when you walked in what you would be facing for the day. You had to be very flexible because fights would break out and other things would happen. Discipline was the hardest aspect of

administration for me because middle school students are into something all the time. Sometimes it's their relationships - he said, she said, they said. Sometimes it's aggressive behavior. At any rate, it was always exciting because something was always going on. You had to have lots of energy and motivation every day you walked in. At this level, Pre-K-2, discipline is not the main focus. We probably had only three or four kids brought to the office this year. Our main source of discipline problems is the bus. To young children, it's just a big, rolling gym. We have assistants in every classroom so all day they are around two disciplinarians who can give them a lot of attention. On the bus it's just the driver and she has to drive. The children realize that right away and take advantage of it. We've implemented an incentive program for bus behavior and it has seemed to help.

As a middle school assistant principal I was responsible for breakfast duty, discipline, and bus discipline. At the beginning of my second year there, the superintendent wanted each of the assistant principals to have a focus. My area was curriculum and instruction and the other assistant principal was given discipline. I was still responsible for bus discipline, but that wasn't much of an issue at the middle school. Evaluations were split three ways between the principal and the two assistant principals. I collected money and supervised at athletic events. Around that time, we implement a testing program called IMS. I was responsible for that program at my school, including training all of the teachers.

Here as an assistant principal I did morning duty in the cafeteria, bus discipline and was in charge of all of the curriculum and instruction. I didn't have to do school-wide discipline because the principal handled that. He was very good at talking to and working with parents. I implemented Accelerated Reader, STAR Reading and Reading Olympics, an

incentive program for students. I also supervised and monitored, did evaluations, talked with parents, and the other usual administrative things.

Basically, I feel like the experience I had in the classroom was what I relied upon as an administrator as opposed to what I learned in my MSA [Master of School Administration] classes. For example, as a teacher I had to correlate my lesson plans to the Standard Course of Study Objectives. When I went to the middle school as the assistant principal, their scores were not where they wanted them to be. In visiting classroom and doing evaluations, I quickly realized that they were not teaching the standard course of study – they were teaching what they wanted to. For example, one seventh grade Social Studies teacher was doing a unit on North Carolina Civil War battles, which is in the eighth grade curriculum. It was a challenge because what they were doing they did well, but the children had not been exposed to the curriculum. It was easy for me to help them correlate their lessons. As an assistant principal there wasn't really anything I had to do that I felt unprepared for. I had either the experience I needed from the classroom or the knowledge I needed from my MSA program.

I worked for the same principal at both schools and we had an excellent relationship. We complimented each other well. I was more hands-on. I love to get my hands into the curriculum and instruction. He was more of the PR [Public Relations] person, talking with the parents and dealing with central office. We had a good balance. I didn't ask for things to do, he just gave me what needed to be done. But in the whole nine years as an assistant principal, I didn't get much experience with budget. I was not really prepared for the budget when I became a principal. Other than that, there's nothing I would change about my assistant principalship. Everything I did helped me gain knowledge, confident and

experience. The things I did also helped me be flexible and learn to deal with all races and socio-economic levels.

My first year as a principal has been a roller coaster ride. As an assistant principal with nine years of experience I thought I was ready to fill those shoes. But it is a tremendous job and I have faced things that I have never faced in all my years of experience. As I said, in the past my principal dealt with parents more often than I did. I've dealt with parents and everything else across the board. Parents who want their child in a certain teacher's room, those who don't want their child in a certain teacher's room, those who can't get their children to school on time and have lots of excuses – just a wide gamut of things that I never dealt with as an assistant principal. I never realized how much time was involved in talking to these people. I have parents, teachers, teacher assistants, central office personnel and others in and out of my office all day. Basically, I don't get any work done during the school day. I stay late after school or come back on Saturday and Sunday. I worked hard as an assistant principal but I work harder as a principal because I am responsible for everything.

At this school you have just as many teacher assistants as teachers. Double the staff means double the work, even though I don't get paid for the teacher assistants because they are not certified staff members. That's not fair because I have to do two evaluations on them and deal with them throughout the year. We are looking for about 650 children when school starts back. With that in mind I should have two assistant principals. There's just as much work to do here with these little ones as there is at the middle school even though we don't have athletics. That's one thing I've battled this year – getting my fair share even though my school is Pre-K-2.

This is my assistant principal's first year here. I hired her last summer. She is very knowledgeable, very qualified, very much into the curriculum and instruction. She has implemented an in-school suspension program and a bus discipline incentive program. She is more tolerant than I am and probably has a better rapport with those she works with, like bus drivers, than I did. She has finesse and overall, she is doing a good job. Last year, we were both responsible for curriculum and instruction but I think this upcoming year, I will give those things to her. She is responsible for school discipline, bus discipline, teacher evaluations, monitoring and supervising. Lots of those things overlap and we both handle them.

The only thing as a principal that I deal with that I didn't have experience with is the budget. When things, like budget, come up that I'm not sure about, I become a bulldog. I sniff around every place I can to find information and answers. I also didn't have much experience with central office, which I found out is a whole new category. The attitude out there is that the K-2 level is not that important because we aren't tested and we don't have athletics. For instance, this is the first year we've had summer school here. We've been fighting for it for years but they kept telling us that after the three - twelve programs were funded, there wasn't any money left. I decided this year that I wasn't giving up – I went into the community and got some parents to get involved in a positive way. One thing I've learned is that, like the old saying, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. You have to be very aware of how you respond to situations, especially with personnel because that has been a challenge this year. Deciding when to involve others in a decision or when to simply dictate can be difficult. Dealing with teachers and assistants when you make a decision as the principal, even a little decision, can be tough.

To prepare my assistant principal for these things, I share as much with her as I can – budget, personnel and just what’s going on. I want to make sure she has as much information about a situation or issue as I have because if I’m away I want her to be able to take over and deal with it. I would also suggest that assistant principals go with principals to monthly meetings and any kind of leadership training. This year, assistant principals will meet monthly with the assistant superintendent for curriculum for a round-table time of sharing of experiences and concerns. I think that is an excellent idea. I think assistant principals also need to be very proficient in technology. They need to know how to do PowerPoint presentations, set up databases, and do word processing. Technology is essential for communication. Leadership training is very important with a particular focus on public relations. I think PR is more important than curriculum and instruction because if you can communicate well and work well with parents, teachers, and central office staff, you’ll be able to move forward in other areas. I think a centralized program for assistant principals would be better than allowing principals to be responsible for it. For example, the finance officer can explain the budget much better than I can.

#### Interview #5

I have been in education for 26 years. I taught English for 13 years at the high school level. I then served as a high school assistant principal. My first year was interesting because my principal was in the Principals’ Executive Program in the fall and was gone for one week each month. During those times, I was *it* and I had to learn things quickly. In the spring, we were in the Gulf War. My principal was in the National Guard Reserve and anticipated being called into service so he trained me to do everything. He taught me about planning staff development, and sent me to TPAI [Teacher Performance Appraisal

Instrument] training so I could do teacher observations and do their summative evaluations. After one year, I got an opportunity to go to another county for a twelve-month assistant principal's position. I worked for a very visionary principal. He took me out of the nuts and bolts kinds of things and made me responsible for PR, curriculum and publications. By that time I had my curriculum and instruction [C&I] certification so I was in charge of the entire C&I program at the school, a pretty big high school. I stayed there two years.

My principal was given the opportunity to go to the other end of the state and open up a \$24 million school and he needed a curriculum specialist so he asked me to go. My sons were in college and my husband was coaching so I got a little place up there and away I went. My principal had to have his hands in every pot. Even though he delegated and gave me things to do, he still had to make sure it got done the way he wanted. I learned a tremendous amount from him and brought many of his ideas to this school when I came, like the big panther painted on the side of the building. There is a lot of his influence on what I do. He was the most caring principal I've ever worked with. He would go to the cafeteria every day at lunch to pick and chat with the kids. He knew the name of every child at that school.

I then came back home and was an assistant principal in the area where I live. I brought lots of things with me that I had experienced and learned. Over the course of the six years, I did lots of things. I did all of the curriculum, the evaluations, and the summatives. I was the instructional leader of that school. I did a lot of the discipline as well. There were three assistant principals at that time and we all stayed pretty busy with discipline. I also did a lot of the SACS [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools] stuff – that the really the first time I had gotten involved in SACS. I had a lot of different experiences that prepared

me to be where I am now. It took me ten years to get here, but I made it and I feel like I was well prepared in all but one area, budget.

I think my MSA [Master of School Administration] program prepared me pretty well for most of my assistant principalships. Some, like those focused on elementary, obviously haven't been of much assistance but I didn't know at the time that I would be in high schools. I guess it was good for me to have the K-12 preparation. In principals' meetings we have to listen to all the elementary and middle stuff. Even though I get frustrated sitting through those talks I know that it is good for me to know what is going on at those grade levels and to hear about what kind of preparation they've had before coming here.

There were things I felt prepared to do that I didn't get to do. I would have liked to have walked in and taken over the whole thing because that's just the way I am. Of course, I couldn't step out of my roll and change the way things were being done because I was new and wasn't familiar with that school. Sometimes that was very frustrating – when I felt like we needed to go in one direction and we were going in the opposite direction. That happened in areas like staff development, workshops, conferences, and SACS. Some teachers felt that way too. They would come and talk to me but wouldn't talk to the principal. I don't know if I did a good enough job communicating what they wanted that they weren't getting to the principal.

I was fortunate that most of my principals took the initiative to bring me in and say, "You need to know how to do this." Others just brought things to me and said, "You're in charge of this, this and this. See ya! Let me know if you need anything." I went to them and asked them to clarify things but it was pretty much up to me to get the job done. Because I am self-motivated I got it done and I tried to do it well so he would be pleased with my work.

It was very difficult to know what one principal wanted. Everything I did was not what she wanted and it was very frustrating. I never could satisfy her. I think it was more of a personality thing. She was very capable and I was very capable but there was a little friction between us for some reason.

When I first found out I was coming to this school as principal I asked about the faculty. Having been here years earlier as the assistant principal, I was happy to find out that the majority of the faculty was still here. That was good because I already knew what kind of teachers they were and what they were capable of doing. I wasn't disappointed when I got here because they were still doing the good things they had been doing before. I also knew that there would be a few teachers I would have problems with but it was good to know that ahead of time and be prepared. Being an assistant principal for ten years I had gone from being a know-it-all, very vocal and very opinionated, to being a listener.

I had resigned myself to being a career assistant principal and I was coming to terms with that. Just about that time, I became a principal. Coming here behind a principal who had been here for 19 years presented some problems of which I was made well aware. I knew I was going to have to deal with some people that didn't want to change anything and others who wanted you to change some things but not others. On the first day I tried to be very specific and very adamant about what we were going to change and by lunchtime I had made some people mad. During the lunch break I think some people realized that we needed to make some changes while other seethed further. It took a good part of the first year for some of the faculty to realize that I was not here to pull the rug out from under them or ruin everything that they've ever done but that the changes I was making were for the best.

I didn't change many things. I picked two or three that the superintendent wanted me to work on. I wanted to do a few things, sit back, watch, make notes and determine if other changes needed to be made. There were. When I got here there were things in the students handbook and faculty handbook I just couldn't live with. One change I made was the dress code and that was the biggest battle I had with the faculty that year. I think it would have helped if they had known it ahead of time but I got here three weeks before school started and the assistant principal and I were working night and day to get the handbooks done because I didn't want to have to live with some things for a year or two and then try to change it. At the end of the year I met with the leadership team and asked them to tell me what they could live with, what they couldn't live without and how far off based they thought I had been. We made some more changes for last year but I've had very few changes to make this summer for next school year. The first year was really tough but it has gotten easier since then.

I usually get here around 7:20am and walk around. Some of the teachers get here as early as 7:00am and I try to speak to them and see if they've got everything they need for the day. They seem to appreciate that a whole lot and it endears me to them. As the first few of the kids come in, I speak to them. I try to be out until the bells ring for first period, then at breaks and at lunch. The kids are used to seeing me and I think visibility is important not only with students but with teachers. This past year I decided that I would go and visit teachers in their classrooms when I'm not observing them, just to chat with them and see what I could do for them. Once they realized that I had not come to ask them a favor or to observe them but that I was just being human, I think it meant a lot. They are much more

willing now to come and talk to me instead of going to the assistant principal. They come directly to me and ask for help.

The only thing I felt really unprepared for was the budget but I understand why you don't turn that over to someone else. When I got this position I went right to the bookkeeper at the school I was working at and asked her to teach me about the budget. You have these classes but it's not like being totally responsible for all of the money that comes through all of the different line items. I knew that I knew curriculum and instruction, staff development and SACS but I was apprehensive about the budget. When I got here, I sat down with the bookkeeper and let her know that I would need her guidance and that I wanted her to make sure that I didn't do anything wrong or questionable. It is important to have a bookkeeper that you can trust. Assistant principals definitely need more exposure to budgeting.

To prepare me for dealing with the budget, one of my principals would always give me one pot of money, like staff development money. I would go through the process of going to department heads and spending the money. I think a good idea to help assistant principals would be a mock budget or scenarios. That way they wouldn't get in trouble if they did something wrong but they could learn that the way you set up accounts or the name of something can make a difference.

When I have questions, I look for help. If it is a local school or school district issue, I ask the superintendent or the high school supervisor. If it's personnel, I call the personnel officer. I still call some of my former principals because they serve as mentors for me. I've worked with them and I trust them. People tell me I should find a female mentor at the high school level but I haven't.

I have a wonderful assistant principal who is the type of assistant principal that I tried to be. He knows what he is supposed to do and gets the job done. I don't have to go behind him to see if he's done what he says he's going to do. Anything that I put in his basket gets taken care of and if he has a question he comes and asks me. We try to sit down and talk about what is going on so we will both be aware and are on the same page. We have been in the situation before where people will try to run back and forth between us and break us apart but we got wise to that in a hurry so we make sure we always portray a united front. He checks with me to see if he's doing something the way I want it done or he gets my opinion on things.

As far as preparing him for the principalship – I've probably done to him about like I've been done. As far as giving him budget experience, I really haven't. He's taken on a lot of rolls whether it's publishing something, handling discipline, conferencing with parents, buses, textbooks, everything. He hasn't really asked much about budget but he may very well have sat down with the bookkeeper from time to time to get some explanations of things. Knowing him, I feel pretty sure he's done some of that on his own. I definitely think all assistant principals need to be exposed to the school improvement process and SACS and those types of things. But the budget is the big, big thing that comes to mind.

I'm not sure about how a program to prepare assistant principals would best be implemented. I don't know who at the board of education would be free to be in charge of it. It might be something that they could do through their assistant principals' meetings since that is scheduled once each month already. Then different people from the central office, like the finance director, could be available for the meetings.

## Interview #6

I have a B.S. [Bachelor of Science] in social work. I quit work and went into a ministry with my husband for 15 years. During that time we ran a state ministry. We then went to a college where my husband was the associate dean for curriculum and I was responsible for working with the faculty and students of five departments in the college. I also taught classes at the college on counseling and the Christian family. We left that ministry and moved to a small town in the central part of the state. My husband started a landscape business and I kept books and took care of our four children. I also worked for him, commercially driving a mower and designing landscapes.

It was during that time that I decided that I needed to go back to school. My son, who was very bright, was in the first grade at the time. They thought he had some kind of problem. With testing, they determined that although his IQ was in the genius range, he had a learning disability. His IQ was 137 and his discrepancy for learning was 69 points. When something like that happens you automatically wonder what you did as a parent that was wrong. People were telling me things but I couldn't make any sense of the situation. I decided that I needed to learn for myself so I needed to go back to school.

I applied to UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greenville], got in, and started my Masters in Special Education. I had just gotten into that program when we decided to move to the eastern part of the state so I transferred to ECU [East Carolina University]. While I was working on that degree I got a job in social work. I did that for three months and then got a lateral entry special education position. I worked full time and went to school full time. The job was at a middle school and it was a new program, an alternative class. They really weren't sure how to set it up so I was the person who designed

the curriculum and the program. I did that for almost nine years, then we got a principal in there who was an idiot. She had no idea what I was doing or how I was working with kids. Our school immediately started losing faculty members at a 30-35% rate because she didn't have any communication skills. I knew I could do better than that so I went back and got my administrative license.

I started applying for positions while I was still teaching but in the county I was working, you have to be born there to get a position. I applied six times and finally figured that it wasn't going to work out so I started applying in surrounding counties. Soon, I got a call to come here as the assistant principal. I immediately started my Ed.S. [Educational Specialist] program and finished it in a short amount of time. I was the assistant principal here for four years and have been the principal for two years.

When I first came, I knew I had to establish credibility. This is a very close-knit community and they have their ideas about how they're going to do stuff. I had to figure out a plan for that. One thing I did was to go to an eighth grade teacher. I was applying for the doctoral program and you had to write a paper on your history, desires and those kinds of things. I asked her to read it and critique it for me. It made her aware of what I was doing and a little bit about me. Knowing faculties the way you know faculties, you know what happened – she shared it, of course. Then I tried to get to know all of them and understand what they were about.

I also tried to understand what was expected of me by the principal. He gave me busses to do and the other typical things. I had to understand how discipline worked and I had never paddled a child. It was difficult coming from a middle school where children had few consequences and there was little accountability. My belief has always been and always

will be that there are consequences for behavior, either good or bad, and I have no problem paddling an eighth grader. I spent one-half of a school year with that principal and I think what I learned most was how to think through an issue. Like discipline – when a child comes in and says one thing, I need to find out everything I need to know about that situation - from him, the people around him, and the teachers – before I make a decision. I also need to know legally from policy how to do that. That was one of the hardest things that I had to learn.

The only thing I didn't really feel prepared for as an assistant principal was how to think through things rationally, calmly and completely, knowing that the consequences would be great for me and for other people. My principal taught me to do that. When I came to him with ideas he would tell me to give them a try. He also knew my strengths and utilized them, like when we had our Top 25 celebration. We were a Top 25 School and he let me plan the whole event. I had experience with things like that because at the college, I planned events for guests who came from all around the world including published dignitaries.

When working with and talking to my principals, I felt open to a point but there is a difference in male and female leadership, and I worked for two males. Men tend to hold on to information and not share it as readily as women tend to. I don't know why that is – I'm not sure if it's a power issue or not. I didn't really learn about finances or the hiring procedures. There were a lot of things that I didn't learn that I knew I needed to learn. Therefore I saw, from my perspective, what I would do if I were in this position. In this position, I felt like it had to be like a marriage. In my marriage it is a co-equal, sharing thing.

When my assistant principal came in, I explained to him how things would be. I would be very up front with him and everything I did he would do so everything I was

involved in, he was involved in. If we were doing budget, he was in here. If we were doing hiring, he was in here. Whatever I did, I felt like in order for him to be involved as a principal, he needed to do all of those things. I didn't get that opportunity from the principals I had and I think it's because that wasn't the way they had done business before. I don't think they deliberately tried to hide anything from me, I just believe this is the way they had always done it and that's it. I wish those relationships had been very open to the point that they wanted to share everything with me. If you don't have those experiences you will be behind. My first year as a principal, I had no clue what was expected of me and I should have known. I had been here for three years.

When I first moved from being an assistant principal to being a principal things changed. As an assistant principal, people come to you and talk openly and freely about things. They tell you how the principal should have done this or shouldn't have done that. That goes on everywhere, it's a common practice and it is understandable. I had to transition from that to being seen in a different light. I didn't feel like I was in a different position even though the buck did stop with me now. I had to make harder decision than I did before and some people don't like that. I had to try to be collegial with them, listen to their opinions and take their concerns into consideration but then I had to make a decision.

Now, I open the door for a lot more input than I did during the first year. There were a lot of trials and tribulations then that I don't intend to see again this year. If as an administrator, my job, as defined by the superintendent, is learning, I have to make sure that everyone is about learning. With the time constraints as they are, I don't have time to deal with students and parents and listen to a complaining faculty. So, I have to thank them for sharing but make it very limited. Another thing I need to do this year is staff development

for myself. I have done none. I felt like I needed to be here, making sure things got done like they were supposed to. The first year as a principal, I didn't go anywhere and last year I went to one thing. This year I have to focus on finishing my dissertation so I have to give up some of it and let other people do it.

There are things that I'm responsible for that I didn't have experience with as an assistant principal. I didn't oversee staff meetings. I did initiate an action plan. I also didn't have much practice in dealing with staff members and their complaints and accusations. I did have practice in dealing with angry parents but I didn't have practice with the budget. I also had practice in communicating with the school improvement team and writing the school improvement plan. I think my principals could have better prepared me by including me in things and by making sure I had information. They could have brought me in when doing the budget and gone through the codes with me the way I sit down with the secretary and the assistant principal. Everyone could have a say.

I don't think it has anything to do with how assertive assistant principals are – they don't have any idea of what they should know. The only way my assistant principal knows that he needs to know something is if I tell him. My responsibility is to show him everything he needs to learn but I don't think that has been the focus of principals before. I have no intention of being here in three years. My responsibility is to prepare him to take over this school – community, school, job – everything. Assistant principals can learn how to do the books or the discipline, anybody can do that. It's my job to teach him about everything I do.

I think some universities are lacking in preparing assistant principals. All students need law and finance before entering the position. I don't think central office staff members or principals need one more thing to do. I do think first year principals should work on the

budget together. They should feel comfortable sitting down with their assistant principals and saying, “Let’s work on this together.” I don’t think they’re going to learn it any other way. I don’t know how other people are but I’m not afraid of anyone taking my job. I don’t think you’re going to get it unless you get instruction and practice.

When I had a question, I called my mentor. I wasn’t given a mentor but I designated two to myself – the two principals I worked with as an assistant principal. People in this county are honest and willing to help. Important topics for me are how you communicate with the faculty, the students and the parents, because that determines to what extent parents trust you. It takes time to show parents that you will take care of their children and treat them fairly. When those issues come up you have to keep your cool and show people that you can handle situations.

#### Interview #7

I was a football coach at NC State and my major was in history. I decided that I wanted to get into teaching and coaching because I felt like if I could get to students at a younger age I could change them a little quicker. I particularly liked the high school and middle school ages. I taught history and coached at a high school for 15 years. I got my Master’s in Administration and when I was there, assistant principals periodically met and discussed topics like budget and finance to organizing a school. That was helpful.

My principal gave me a good preparation for the principalship because I did a little bit of everything. She allowed me to be involved in curriculum, personnel and other things. I didn’t just sit and do discipline all day. Discipline is part of it, but assistant principals need to get involved in curriculum and as much as possible, the financial part of it. Especially curriculum because you need a good curriculum base to be a good principal. You also have

to be well rounded because you have to be able to set up a school such that teachers can flourish and best use their talents. You have to know people and how to deal with them. You have to treat people like people and not like things. You don't tell them to do it, you ask them to do it and you respect them.

I take a lot of things from my football coach from college. My philosophy comes from diverse backgrounds – him and my coaching experience. I think applying the organizational aspects of coaching helps me to be a better administrator. Curriculum wise, I think you must be a good teacher before you can be a good administrator. It doesn't always work that way I guess but I enjoyed teaching and I think there is more than one way to skin a cat. The techniques that I used teaching I refer to now.

To prepare yourself for the principalship involves a multitude of things. You have to be well-balanced. You need to know curriculum, know how it's organized and do everything you can to help teachers teach. Give them guidance and set expectations. When things aren't like they are supposed to be, you handle it in a human way. Sit down, talk about, and treat people like people. There are a lot of things about the principalship that won't prepare you until you get there. At the same time, there are some things that could better prepare you. In the situation I had, I ended up being exposed to a lot of different things. It seemed pretty rigorous at the time but it did prepare me well.

I went to Fayetteville State for my Masters and they have a very good program. A new chancellor came in there and they revamped the program. It was a very rigorous program, a very good program. I was also in the first group to take the \$500 test, as I call it. I think having those high standards made me a better administrator. As an assistant principal or a principal your preparation never ends. You have to constantly read, keep up, go to PEP

[Principals' Executive Program] classes. You constantly prepare yourself for the next year or the next program you are implementing. It is an ongoing process.

My principal exposed me to things by giving me the responsibility. I got to observe teachers a lot and I was directly involved with curriculum decisions and situations. Some interesting personnel issues came up as well and I had a chance to investigate and work through some of those. The principal knew I wanted to be a principal so she exposed me to things. As a principal, you don't want to lose a good person but you want to do what is best for them and expose them to as much as possible so they'll be a good principal one day. I think it's good, if the county can afford it, to put together a program for assistant principals. You can get a lot of that from programs at the colleges and stuff.

It helps to be able to get on the phone and talk to someone you know. Networking is good. You can ask your principal, someone at the county office or someone at another school. They can give you help and information about certain things. I taught law and I had an interest in it so that helped me. Not that it mattered much, lawyers have to look up things because the law books are so thick. You should keep your mouth shut and not make a decision until you find out what's going on. I did that and I still have to do it now.

My principal and I talked about what I needed to know but I think she already knew it. She would just give it to me. If I could change something about my assistant principalship, I would spend more time researching curriculum. You don't have time to do it because you're so involved in the daily activities of the school. I would make more time for curriculum, to study and read.

As a principal, you go to more meetings. You spend more time on curriculum. It is always a challenge to organize the school to best use the talents of the teachers. The teachers

here do a good job, it's just a matter of me getting out of the way and letting them do what they do best. I need to know what's going on, but I try to keep as much paperwork away from them as I can. As an administrator my job is to support the teacher and the classroom. That is the bottom line.

I operate on three rules. They are written on the wall here – do what's right, do your best and treat others the way you want to be treated. If you go by those you can be successful anywhere. You can run into problems everyday. It's what you do with those problems. We operate the school on those principals, the school improvement plan and everything else. Yes, you have high expectations but you share those. I don't like to send a memo. You have to keep up with things, do the paper work and document but I like to see people eyeball to eyeball, in private, if there is a problem. I don't like to buckshot it, I like to rifle it. Some things you need to buckshot, like the general policy. I don't spend much time on that – it's right there, read it.

The kids and faculty are good here. It's been a good experience. We all get flabbergasted sometimes with so much going on but I enjoy it. There were things I did here, like clean the place up. We've done a lot but we're not where we need to be. It's important because perception is everything. When kids come to a nice, clean school it makes a difference. We've worked hard on the curriculum. We try to limit the rules. I don't believe in too many rules. You have to have rules, of course, and we're specific in our rule book but you don't want kids to feel like they're being beaten over the head by rules. We want an environment where the kids don't feel like they're in prison.

I quote Thomas Edison a lot here. He didn't believe in regimentation. He believed in order for people to be innovative they have to have freedom and I believe that too, within

certain guidelines and rules. We at this school are always trying new things and so far they've turned out pretty good. Sometimes they don't turn out so good but I believe you have to be willing to try new things. Like the Freshmen Academy we started here after looking at the needs of the students. A good administrator, and you can triple underline this, needs to listen to teachers. We don't listen to teachers enough. Demming went over to Japan in the 80's because he was hired by Toyota. He almost put other car companies out of business. The reason he turned that company around was because he listened to the workers on the assembly line. He organized it, put it together, and turned Toyota around to make it the best in the world.

We need to do that. Teachers are the front line people and we don't listen to them enough. They know what's going on. Besides, they are the ones who are going to have to implement things. We try to do that here. We meet in small groups with teachers during their planning periods and get input from them at that point. One small meeting topic is talking about the things they need to know and another is curriculum. We're trying to get input from teachers, then put programs together and put things into place.

As an AP [Assistant Principal], I didn't have any experience organizing the staff as it relates to the curriculum. Scheduling has been a challenge because we try to let the needs of the students drive the schedule. We do a lot of creative scheduling instead of pouring everybody in the funnel. We also work very closely with the middle school. Our ninth grade teachers meet with their eighth grade teachers. They work together. Parents appreciate it too because we get students in the right place as they come in the door from middle school. Scheduling, organizing the curriculum and different aspects of the school are things that are different. Then when people come in the door they want to see the principal. They know

that the principal is going to make the final decision at the school level – that’s quite a bit different. When my AP makes a decision, I back it up. If I don’t, she needs to go somewhere else because she can’t depend on me. I’ll back her up but if she’s wrong, I’ll tell her and if I’m wrong, she’ll tell me. That happens. I make mistakes every day. I apologize and we go on. Setting the philosophy of the school is something the principal is responsible for. Also the environment or the culture of school. That is exciting. You also get more of the financial aspect as the principal.

When things come up that I’m not sure about, I call the county office or a colleague. I call someone at the county office and if they don’t know they can tell me who to call. I just keep calling people until I get an answer. I’ve had to call Raleigh before and sometimes that’s what it takes to get an answer. Sometimes you think you know the answer or sometimes it’s something very unusual, you never know.

I’m very blessed because my assistant principal is an experienced administrator. She’s been a principal. She’s more knowledgeable than me about lots of things. She’s very organized, more organized than I am and she does a very good job. I make sure that the school has access to her talent and expertise. I make sure that’s she heavily involved at working with teachers because she’s good at it. She was a good teacher herself. I try to keep her informed. I’m so busy sometimes that I don’t do a good job but I’m working on it. Sometimes I forget to tell her things but I think it’s important for her to be informed of everything I can remember to tell her. That helps her develop as an administrator. I have to make sure that she’s not just sitting there doing discipline all day. Some days are like that but I try to make sure she gets involved in other things.

I think as AP program needs to come from the county. I don't think it would take too much time. You do an in-service four times a year. Let APs come to the county office – that way you can pool your resources better by training them all at one time. That's the way we did it in my county.