

## **ABSTRACT**

WHITEMAN, KAREN MARIE. Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Instructional Leadership. (Under the direction of Dr. Kenneth Brinson, Jr.).

Ensuring student learning and success is the primary goal of any school administrator, so their leadership must embody and champion this. Therefore, strong instructional leadership skills are necessary for administrators to possess and be able to apply. However, teachers often have negative perceptions of instructional leadership which make the processes, initiatives, and changes that need to take place to realize school goals more difficult to achieve. The purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to explore middle school instructional leadership. There were two research questions being asked; 'What perceptions of instructional leadership do middle school teachers possess?' and 'Why do some middle school teachers have negative perceptions of their administrators as instructional leaders?'

Fifty-nine middle school teachers from one large urban county in North Carolina participated in a two-part multiple choice survey to ascertain their perceptions of instructional leadership and their administrators as instructional leaders. Then three of those teachers agreed to participate in a thirteen question interview to gain some insight into why those perceptions, either positive or negative, persist.

Study findings revealed that the participants were divided regarding their perceptions of their administrators as instructional leaders and have varied perceptions of instructional leadership. Some of the results replicated those from other studies, but new insights were revealed as well.

Close analysis of the data revealed several key influences on middle school teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership such as age and number of years teaching, number of years at the current school, and perceptions about the administrator's competence as a teacher and with the curriculum. Some other influences on negative perceptions of instructional leadership are how frequently the administrator communicates with the staff, how feedback and the evaluation process is handled, and whether or not the administrator makes the staff feel valued and involved in school wide decisions.

Recommendations are given to assist principals and assistant principals with strengthening their instructional leadership skills, facilitating meaningful changes and initiatives in their schools that will lead to increased student achievement, and taking actions which will be perceived positively by teachers and cause them to have more constructive perceptions of instructional leadership.

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Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Instructional Leadership

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

*For my mother, Cheryl Bills*

Mom, I dedicate this dissertation to you because you have always been there to motivate me and keep me moving ahead toward my goals. From the time I was five years old you instilled in me the qualities of perseverance and dedication to reach higher. You told me I would be going to college...there was no other option...and you helped me fulfill that. You always told me to 'keep my options open' and to never stop going for what I wanted, no matter how hard the journey was or what obstacles were ahead. I am very grateful that you are the relentless person you are, because I am who I am because of you. Thank you and I love you very much.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Karen Marie Whiteman was born in Buffalo, New York and grew up in Kenmore. After graduating from Kenmore West Senior High School, she enrolled in Fredonia State to study psychology and elementary education. After graduation, she began substitute teaching in Western New York and earned her first Master's degree in elementary education from the University of Buffalo. In 1995, she moved to North Carolina for her first full time public school position to teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade in Richmond County.

In 1995 she moved to Durham and worked in a magnet school, and then in 2000 she began working in the Wake County Public School District. In 2008 while teaching third grade, she graduated from North Carolina State University with her second Master's in school administration. In 2009 she accepted a position as a middle school instructional resource teacher and then was promoted to assistant principal, a position she held for two years. That January she began working on a doctorate in educational leadership at NC State and her interest in instructional leadership in the middle school was solidified.

In late 2012, she moved back to Buffalo, New York to be close to her family again and to continue her career in the place she had always thought of as home. In June of 2013 she began her career as a principal at Saint Bernadette's Catholic School, serving grades Pre-K 3 – 8, in Orchard Park, New York, and also conducts staff development for other teachers in the Diocese of Buffalo. She is looking forward to continuing to strengthen her skills as an instructional leader for many years to come.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I don't think I would ever have begun my doctoral program without the foundation that my mother gave me. Growing up, I was taught to shoot for the stars, that I could be and achieve anything I wanted. I was encouraged to try to fulfill my dreams, and learned independence and determination. You are my rock, Mom. Thanks for pushing me.

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I also want to give very special thanks to the 59 wonderful teachers who agreed to fill out the surveys, especially the three teachers who participated in interviews. I could not have finished this work without you and I will forever remember your kindness and willingness to give up some of your time to help me out.

And last but not least, I'd like to thank the staff and students at St. Bernadette School. You all make my job easier and a lot of fun. I love going to work each day where I get to help inspire young minds and hearts. You Rock!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	ix
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	x
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Study Background.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Study Purpose.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	11
Study Significance.....	13
Overview of Methodological Approach.....	19
Chapter Summary and Organization.....	20
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Introduction.....	21
Instructional Leadership.....	21
<i>Background</i> .....	21
<i>Setting the stage for the current study</i> .....	23
<i>Perceptions of instructional leadership</i> .....	24
<i>Middle school research</i> .....	31
<i>Assistant principals</i> .....	34
<i>Summary</i> .....	40
Perceptual Theory.....	41
<i>Summary</i> .....	46
<i>Gathering teacher perceptions in North Carolina</i> .....	46
Teacher Resistance.....	58
<i>Summary</i> .....	65
Middle School History and Theory.....	66
<i>Junior high</i> .....	66

<i>Middle school</i> .....	70
<i>Middle school reform</i> .....	76
<i>Middle school students</i> .....	79
<i>Middle school teachers</i> .....	82
<i>Middle schools in North Carolina</i> .....	85
Chapter Summary.....	87
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b> .....	88
Introduction.....	88
Research Design.....	89
Research Questions .....	92
Site Selection and Sampling Criteria.....	92
Data Collection .....	96
<i>Surveys</i> .....	97
<i>Interviews</i> .....	100
Data Analysis .....	101
<i>Surveys</i> .....	102
<i>Interviews</i> .....	104
Research Validity and Reliability .....	105
<i>Validity</i> .....	105
<i>Reliability</i> .....	106
Subjectivity Statement.....	108
Ethical Issues .....	111
Limitations of the Study .....	115
Chapter Summary.....	117
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS</b> .....	118
Introduction.....	118
Results of Survey Part 1 .....	118
<i>Questions one through eight</i> .....	121
<i>Demographic questions</i> .....	129

Results of Survey Part 2 .....	136
<i>Framing school goals</i> .....	136
Results of Interviews .....	158
<i>Question 1</i> .....	162
<i>Question 2</i> .....	164
<i>Question 3</i> .....	167
<i>Question 4</i> .....	169
<i>Question 5</i> .....	171
<i>Question 6</i> .....	173
<i>Question 7</i> .....	177
<i>Question 8</i> .....	179
<i>Question 9</i> .....	180
<i>Question 10</i> .....	183
<i>Question 11</i> .....	185
<i>Question 12</i> .....	187
<i>Question 13</i> .....	191
Summary.....	194
<b>CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	195
Introduction.....	195
Study Purpose .....	195
Study Procedures.....	196
Discussion.....	197
Summary of Findings .....	202
<i>Survey part 1</i> .....	202
<i>Survey part 2</i> .....	204
<i>Interviews</i> .....	204
Conclusions.....	211
<i>Summary</i> .....	222
Implications and Suggestions for Practice.....	222

Recommendations for Future Research.....	235
Summary.....	238
References.....	240
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>257</b>
Appendix A.....	258
Appendix B.....	260
Appendix C.....	266
Appendix D.....	268
Appendix E.....	269
Appendix F.....	270

## LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 4.1</i>	Participant Demographic Data.....	105
<i>Table 4.2</i>	Response to Questions 1 – 5, Framing School Goals.....	118
<i>Table 4.3</i>	Response to Questions 6 – 10, Communicating School Goals.....	120
<i>Table 4.4</i>	Response to Questions 11 – 17, Supervising and Evaluating Instruction.....	121
<i>Table 4.5</i>	Response to Questions 18 – 22, Coordinating the Curriculum.....	123
<i>Table 4.6</i>	Response to Questions 23 – 28, Monitoring Student Progress.....	124
<i>Table 4.7</i>	Response to Questions 29 – 32, Protecting Instructional Time.....	126
<i>Table 4.8</i>	Response to Questions 33 – 37, Maintaining High Visibility.....	127
<i>Table 4.9</i>	Response to Questions 38 – 40, Providing Incentives for Teachers.....	129
<i>Table 4.10</i>	Response to Questions 41 – 48, Promoting Professional Development.....	130
<i>Table 4.11</i>	Response to Questions 49 – 52, Developing and Enforcing Academic Standards.....	132
<i>Table 4.12</i>	Response to Questions 53 – 56, Providing Incentives for Learning.....	133
<i>Table 4.13</i>	Most Frequent Responses for Each Subscale.....	134
<i>Table 4.14</i>	Average Teacher Ratings and Rank for Each Subscale.....	135
<i>Table 4.15</i>	How Teachers Qualified for the Interview.....	136
<i>Table 4.16</i>	Part 1 Responses of the Teachers Who Qualified for the Interview.....	136
<i>Table 4.17</i>	Partial Part 1 Results for Participants with Five or More ‘No’ Replies....	138

**LIST OF FIGURES**

*Figure 2.1* North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey.....45

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Study Background

Educational leadership is like an enormous jigsaw puzzle, the kind with hundreds of miniature pieces that look very similar. The pieces, known as the skills and responsibilities of the leader, must fit together to create an individual who is able to lead a school community successfully into the future and achieve its numerous and varied goals. As stated by Borko and Putnam (1995) and Aistrup (2010), reform efforts are mandating changes in educational practices and leadership that will assist students with developing deep understanding of important content, think critically, construct and solve problems, make sense of new information, communicate effectively, and leave school ready to be lifelong learners and responsible citizens. Administrators, being removed from the classroom, can only impact student learning through the teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Furthermore, Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) stated that “Educational leadership is rapidly evolving into new forms, forms that are responsive to the very diverse and challenging needs of democratic societies, of knowledge-generating organizations, and of futuristic concerns for a sustainable world” (as cited in Hobson, 2009, p. 36). “Research on effective schools has verified the proposition that schools are rarely effective unless the principal is a proficient instructional leader” (Ellis, 1986, p. 3). Administrators who exhibit profound instructional leadership skills are essential to student achievement (Aistrup, 2010; McCoy & Holt, 2012).

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Some of the apparently unlimited number of puzzle pieces are Manager, Disciplinarian, Encourager, Scheduler, Participant, Evaluator, Instructional Leader, Community Builder, Caregiver, Judge, Mediator, Public Relations Expert, Communicator, Data Analyzer, Visionary, Learner, Reflective Practitioner, and Planner (Aistrup, 2010; Chapman, 2009; Collins, 2008; Daniels, 2009; Flamini, 2010; Hunter-Heaston, 2010; Goslin, 2008; Kolsky, 2009; McEwan, 2000). All of these pieces fit together perfectly to enhance the school leader's success, but recently, the piece titled Instructional Leadership has become an even more essential piece and a main focus of school administrators and college preparation programs (Aistrup, 2010; Flamini, 2010; Hunter-Heaston, 2010; Kolsky, 2009). This is evident in the literature. George (1990) stated that when a large school district in the southeast moved from the junior high school model to the middle school model in 1987, each of the middle school principals stated that their plans and goals for the first year centered on instructional leadership. A 2002 study of middle school principals conducted by the New York State Education Department supports this finding as well. The study results showed that principals ranked instructional leadership at number eight out of twenty-five common areas of study in higher education administrative preparation programs. Fifty-nine percent of principals ranked it as 'essential' and 33% ranked it as 'very useful' (New York State Survey of Principals of Schools with Middle Level Grades, 2002, <http://www.nysmsa.org/displaycommoncfm?an=1>).

Thus, it is clear that "Principals must be the instructional leaders of schools"

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

(Valentine, 1986, p. 392). There are various reasons for the fact that instructional leadership is an essential facet of school leadership (Aistrup, 2010; Chapman, 2009; Collins, 2008; Flamini, 2010; Goslin, 2008; Hunter-Heaston, 2010; Kolsky, 2009; Marshall, 2005). It is commonly accepted by the general community that the central goal of all schools is to help students learn as much as they can to prepare them for the next grade level, high school graduation, and beyond. This puts teaching and instructional practices at the forefront of school stakeholders' minds (Collins, 2008; Daniels, 2009; Ellis, 1986; Marshall, 2005; Ohlson, 2009). Sanzo, Sherman, and Clayton (2011) stated that principals “need to be instructionally minded and strive to spend portions of their time during the instructional day focused on student learning and working directly with staff to support their instructional needs and efforts” (p. 41).

Leadership is to a great extent about facilitating change, and the goals of instructional leadership are to change instructional practices and systems to produce improvement (Aistrup, 2010; Egley & Jones, 2005; Sanzo et. al., 2011). School leaders must ensure that “equitable and empirically supported practices are an integral part of the instructional process; this will be explicitly manifested through the leader’s ability to serve less as a classical manager and more as an agent of change” (Flamini, 2010, p. 9). “Leadership requires disturbing people – but at a rate they can absorb” (Manders, 2008, p. 15). Educators are keenly aware that students must be prepared for the future global job market, which we know in years to come will be saturated with diverse and technological jobs that have never

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

existed before, and that teachers are the key to achieving this.

Budget restrictions often cause teacher support positions such as instructional coaches and curriculum specialists to be eliminated, so the essential curricular and instructional support tasks of these people are transferred to administrators because there is no one else to do it. This necessitates and requires that administrators possess the capability to help their teachers improve instructionally (Knight, 2007). Leadership is to a large extent about facilitating change, and the goals of instructional leadership are to change instructional practices and systems to produce improvement (Aistrup, 2010; Egley & Jones, 2005). Principals who accept the responsibility of leadership must mobilize others to engage in a change process (Goslin, 2008). As a result, principals must be able to provide specific resources such as articles, lesson plans, ideas for assessment, ways to differentiate/varied instructional methods, and materials in addition to overseeing the management of the school. In addition, they must attend meetings such as team meetings and department meetings, so they can communicate with their teachers and provide suggestions and guidance, as well as be in tune and in touch with what they are doing and planning. In addition, the expectations and demands on both teachers and administrators have morphed and tightened drastically. The art of teaching has changed from stand and deliver or 100% whole-class instruction to a student-centered, differentiated, and centers-driven methodology. This is partially due to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation reauthorized by President George W. Bush in 2002 (Styron & Nyman, 2008), that has placed a focus on the way teachers teach and students

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

learn as well as on student test scores. All students are expected to be proficient on state tests by the end of the 2013 – 2014 school year and meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or face sanctions (Chappelle & Price, 2012; Lutz, 2004). Schools must improve student achievement in subgroups of students such as students with disabilities, black students, students with limited English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged students. Schools that fail to meet the accountability standards for these subgroups for two years in a row are considered in school improvement and must implement extra interventions until student achievement is improved (Aistrup, 2010; Styron & Nyman, 2008). According to Anfara Jr., Patterson, Buehler, and Gearity (2006), the number of schools in need of improvement is in the thousands and rising as AYP standards become more and more rigorous.

Thus, the realization that traditional teaching methods are not getting the job done is constantly bubbling to the surface of school leaders' minds (Knight, 2007). Aistrup (2010) elaborated on this notion by declaring "If schools are to effect a change that focuses on the improvement of instruction and ensures that all students achieve, teachers, principals, and other staff members must learn new techniques and strategies for approaching these tasks" (p. 3). Effective instruction must be the primary concern of school leaders and stakeholders (Dennis, 2009). Not surprisingly, this requires more expertise on the part of teachers and more support from their administration (Aistrup, 2010; Flamini, 2010). School administrators need to "go beyond the routine in initiating school improvement efforts" (Ellis, 1986), p. 4) which dictates that they need to decide when and how to intervene in the

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

classroom (Ellis, 1986). Furthermore, this means that the instructional leader must come up with ways to bestow teachers with a stronger sense of professional power to teach students effectively (Dennis, 2009). Hunter-Heaston (2010), also noted that “teachers must know that they are the leader in their classroom. They must take responsibility for change in their classroom and change school-wide” (p. 39).

In response, schools are searching for ways to achieve Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and ultimately their state's proficiency expectations by the end of this school year, which is fast approaching (Aistrup, 2010; Hunter-Heaston, 2010). Thus, as stated by Murphy and Shipman (1998), embedded in the concept of instructional leadership is the notion that administrators can support teachers with their instruction through modeling, coaching, and guidance, and thus have a core understanding of how to assist students in the act of learning (as cited in Flamini, 2010). Teachers can no longer simply regurgitate information into their students, and administrators can no longer just manage what goes on in the school. Parents are demanding a higher/the highest quality of education for their children (Hjelle, 2001) and will question teachers and administrators when expected grades aren't earned and success is not achieved. Thus, administrators must be strongly aware of and connected to everything that goes on in every classroom on a daily basis.

Teachers must continue to grow as educators, develop leadership skills, and become better at the art of teaching. Most teachers actually embrace this (Hjelle, 2001; Knight, 2007; Toney, 2012). Not surprisingly, it is a major part of the administrator's job to make sure that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

this is possible and actually takes place (Aistrup, 2010; Egley & Jones, 2005; Marshall, 2005). So, there must be an overarching belief that the school's main purpose is for teaching and learning (Flamini, 2010), and a major part of this is providing meaningful and useful workshops and training for teachers on a regular basis (Ohlson, 2009). However, conventional methods of staff development are not effective. Bush's research (as cited in Knight, 2007, p. 2) echoes this finding; "Traditional forms of professional development are not effective, usually getting no better than a 10% implementation rate".

One-shot training does not address practical concerns, allow for follow-up, or provide enough information to teachers, so these responsibilities are falling on the shoulders of principals and assistant principals over the long-term. As discussed by Ellis (1986), Rutherford et. al. (1983) found that it takes many years of support and facilitation to implement and sustain any instructional innovation. However, when too many initiatives or new programs are introduced and not supported, the school culture can shift to one where teachers are resistant to change, thinking that 'this too shall pass' (Ohlson, 2009). Thus, in addition to knowing what training their teachers need, school administrators are required to know how that information should be presented, who the experts in those fields are, and what should be done after the training so it has an impact on teacher practice and student learning. In order to adequately design effective and significant change initiatives, school administrators must be instructional leaders who can create or continue professional development that makes it easier for teachers to implement change initiatives (Knight, 2007).

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

They must also understand “how teachers grow in their field of expertise” and “have plans to unify organizational goals and teacher needs into a single entity” (Dennis, 2009, p. 50) which promotes improved student learning and more powerful instruction. Given that instructional leadership encompasses strengthening teachers’ instructional skills and ensuring student achievement, school leaders must be in tune to the fact that teachers are also leaders in the school and therefore can have a huge influence on it.

Teachers often look to each other for guidance before making changes or doing things differently. Instructional leaders actually view this as a positive in their schools and cultivate this collegiality and mutual trust between their teachers (Ellis, 1989). Reeves affirms this by stating that administrators must realize that teachers have an enormous effect on the instructional practices of their colleagues and that teachers will often turn to one another for help or suggestions before an administrator (as cited in Chapman, 2009).

It is an all too common feeling amongst the general public as well as the academic community that schools are not doing a good job of educating this country’s children (Chappelle & Price, 2012; Garland, 2004; Goslin, 2008; Ohlson, 2012; Toney, 2012). “America’s public schools across the country continue to struggle to develop students that are prepared for the academic requirements that the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands” (McCoy & Holt, 2012). The United States has ranked well below numerous other countries in math, reading and science proficiency for quite some time (NAEP, nationsreportcard.gov; McCoy & Holt, 2012) and this trend does not seem to be improving in recent years. As a result, there is great

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

pressure on principals to demonstrate that students are mastering the curriculum.

Accordingly, it is clearly obvious that the puzzle piece known as School Leadership has grown substantially both in size and importance. According to Manning (2000) and Marshall (2005), school administrators must function as instructional leaders who recognize how to teach and how students learn, understand and are familiar with the curricula, and possess the ability to choose and lead appropriate staff development. They must be well aware of and well versed in best practices, programs, and materials, and work to make them available to all teachers. They have to be able to bring about meaningful and profound change in the classrooms because teachers must continually develop their ability to teach effectively. They must also be highly visible on a daily basis within the school and thus available to give support and have awareness of what is going on in the classrooms (Andrews, 1986 as cited in Ellis, 1986). This requires that the staff must be motivated by and buy into the instructional leader's change efforts (Daniels, 2009). Similarly, Quinn (2002) noted that instructional leaders need to be able to motivate and inspire teachers with the end goal of positively impacting student achievement (as cited in Flamini, 2010). "Ensuring quality instruction is an integral part of the principal's leadership responsibilities" (Marshall, 2005, p. 101). Principals who accept the responsibility of leadership must mobilize others to engage in a change process through instructional leadership (Goslin, 2008).

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is an enormous amount of research on instructional leadership and teacher perceptions of certain programs and conditions in schools available to guide and enlighten us. However, there is not a wealth of research that specifically targets teacher perceptions of instructional leadership, especially at the middle school level and focusing on the perceptions that are negative, or the reasons why these perceptions exist. Since perceptions are reality for that person (Pulleyn, 2012), they are highly influential and guide us to act in specific ways, make certain decisions, and shape our beliefs. According to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) in a report created in 2001, "The traditions, beliefs, and attitudes of many members of the educational community - teachers, administrators, central office personnel, board of education members, parents and community people - are major obstacles to systemic change and improved academic achievement in the middle grades" (p. 1). Danley Sr. and Burch (1978) asserted "The extent to which the leader is able to facilitate improvement of instruction is directly affected by the way in which the teacher perceives the leader's behavior in his leadership role in these areas" (p. 78).

Unfortunately, in my experience this is true; many middle school teachers do not view their administrators as instructional leaders and do not feel that this is their domain or responsibility. The perceptions that these teachers have can cause them to be unsupportive and critical of initiatives, which can cripple a school's reform efforts, poison the culture, and ultimately lead to low student performance. Thus, it is essential for principals and assistant

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

principals to understand the complexity of the perceptions of teachers regarding instructional leadership and the effect they can have on student learning (Marshall, 2005).

Instructional leaders try to build a partnership with teachers to bring about positive instructional change and celebrate the successes (Manders, 2008). But, when the teachers do not understand instructional leadership and why it is an important part of a school administrator's job this becomes nearly impossible, even for the most competent and experienced administrator. Some possible reasons for this are they have not taken college courses on leadership, have not held any leadership roles themselves, and have not been exposed to the ideals of leadership. It is difficult to support and be open to things we don't understand (Knight, 2009). This can be compounded by the fact that assistant principals are not often seen as instructional leaders given the nature of their responsibilities (Anderson, 1987; Celikten, 2001; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Wells, Scollay, & Rinehart, 1999; Zeitoun & Newton, 2002). After working in a middle school for three years and witnessing these negative forces in action as well as the consequences that can arise from them, I wanted to explore them in hopes of contributing some insight to the educational community.

### **Study Purpose**

This study was designed for two different, but closely related, purposes which will hopefully allow me to accomplish some key goals. My desire was to find out how middle school teachers in other schools perceive instructional leadership and if some of

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

these are negative, why that is the case. As a result, my research questions are *'What perceptions of instructional leadership do middle school teachers possess'* and *'Why do some middle school teachers have negative perceptions of their administrators as instructional leaders'?*

The inspiration for this study came from my own experiences as a middle school assistant principal. I considered myself an instructional leader and focused on strengthening my skills in this area. One of the ways I sought to enhance my own development as a school leader was to frequently give surveys to the teachers I worked closely with in order to find out their thoughts and perceptions about my performance. The results of the surveys consistently reflected the fact that instructional leadership should not be my domain or my role, which was extremely disheartening to me. A majority of those teachers believed that my function was to handle student discipline and parent complaints, lead and participate in meetings, create certain processes, protect them from new responsibilities, and attend to their needs. The veiled, but nonetheless apparent, point was that I needed to leave the teaching to them. Since this is contrary to the direction that educational leadership is currently moving as implied by much of the research on school leadership (Aistrup, 2010; Flamini, 2010; Hunter-Heaston, 2010; Kolsky, 2009), it is worthwhile and imperative to find out more about this phenomenon.

In conjunction with my first purpose, I wanted to add to the current knowledge base by finding out why certain teachers have negative perceptions and views of instructional

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

leadership and the roles and responsibilities of instructional leaders. As stated by Lambert (2003), a successful instructional leader's effectiveness is dependent upon his or her ability to create strong collaboration, frequent and meaningful discussion, and shared norms amongst teachers. However, this is not always what the teachers want. According to the NYSED (2001a), people are important to reform efforts, so "their action or inaction, their support or non-support, their willingness or unwillingness to change are the determining factors when it comes to making a difference. Their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions will frame what happens" (p. 5).

This is of vital importance and is suggested by many researchers. For example, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) suggested that a wide gap exists between educators' recognition of the "broad indicators" (p. 218) of effective instructional leadership and their capacity to translate those indicators into leadership behaviors and practices. This implies that instructional leadership is not clearly translated into appropriate actions by administrators that are received amicably by teachers. I hoped to shed light on the reasons, motivations, and causes of negative teacher perceptions of instructional leadership so current and future middle school leaders might be able to utilize the information to institute reforms and change efforts in their schools with more meaningful teacher buy-in and support. "The approaching decade needs leaders who will take risks, move staff members forward in sound educational research, and meet the needs of students on a daily basis" (Daniels, 2009, p. 139).

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

This study aimed at providing information about teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership so administrators can foster improvement and growth within their teachers and the school community as a whole. If school leaders can understand even a little more about what lies beneath some of the teachers' motivations and perceptions, I believe that they can begin and sustain real change efforts and possibly alter teachers' perceptions for the better. This will ultimately result in a stronger school culture and higher student achievement.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Administrator or school leader**, for the purpose of this study, refers to both assistant principals and principals equitably unless otherwise stated.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** is a measure of the yearly progress of different groups of students at the school, district, and state levels against yearly target goals in reading and mathematics and the minimum level of progress in reading and mathematics proficiency made by students in a year. All public schools must measure and report AYP as outlined in NCLB and if a school misses one target goal, it does not make AYP.

**Assistant Principal** is the administrator who is second in command to the principal. Assistant principals carry out tasks assigned by the principal and support the principal's vision, mission, and values for the school.

**Instructional Leadership** is the ability of a school administrator to help teachers become better at teaching and helping students learn. This includes having knowledge of the

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

curriculum, creating and presenting workshops, choosing and providing appropriate and successful materials and strategies, and providing feedback and support to teachers as they implement new instructional techniques. An instructional leader is one who is involved in all aspects of any practices that are implemented to help students learn (McEwan, 2000).

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** is the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Authorization Act of 1965. It added strict new accountability changes and standards for teachers, approved new consequences for Title I schools that do not meet student achievement standards for two or more consecutive years, and mandated that every child be taught by a Highly Qualified teacher. The law's major goal is for every school to be proficient in reading and mathematics by the end of the 2013-14 school year as measured by state tests.

**Perceptions** are results of observations and serve as a means of understanding. According to Dictionary.com, a perception is a unified awareness that comes from sensory processes when a stimulus is present. Perceptions are composed of stimuli and memories that are utilized to recognize and interpret new information. In essence, perceptions are views which encompass our beliefs, thoughts, and ideas about something and are often extremely difficult to change.

**Reflective Practice**, as stated by Larrivee and Cooper (2006), is “a questioning orientation toward one’s actions, decisions, and outcomes and an acceptance of responsibility for one’s professional practice” (p. 30).

**Pedagogy**, as defined by Oxford Dictionaries Online, is the method and practice of teaching,

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

especially as an academic subject or concept. Merriam-Webster's online encyclopedia identifies it as the art, science, or profession of teaching.

**Resistance** is opposing or struggling against something or someone. According to Giles (2006), "Teacher resistance, it is argued, typically takes the form of a desire and intention to maintain existing practices in the face of changes that they perceive as unwanted or threatening" (p. 180).

**Teacher leadership** is realized when teachers utilize their expertise about teaching and learning to improve the culture and academic success of the school (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). "Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 287). Teacher leaders are usually selected by an administrator and are highly respected amongst their peers. They are more involved in school-wide decision making and usually serve on or facilitate/lead various committees or teams in the school.

### **Study Significance**

This study is significant for a variety of reasons. Knowledge of some of the reasons why teachers may have negative perceptions of instructional leadership can help school administrators become stronger instructional leaders, which in turn can have a positive effect

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

on student success and learning (Aistrup, 2010). Research shows that when teachers utilize effective teaching strategies and practices, student learning is enhanced (Aistrup, 2010; McEwan, 2000), and principals are essential in facilitating this process. Manning (2000) established that middle school teachers understand what their students need in order to be ready for high school and life in the future, but there is still the necessity to move forward by lifting academic achievement even higher. As stated by Knight (2007), "Teachers need to keep trying to learn and implement better instructional practices if schools are going to get better at reaching all students" (p. 5). Competent instructional leaders can make this happen, so it's essential that principals strengthen their skills in this area (Aistrup, 2010).

According to Valentine (1986), being a principal requires being "open to self-assessment and to the assessment of others" (p. 398). Most successful administrators strive to become better leaders and more capable of helping students achieve learning and success (Manders, 2008). Self-improvement, reflection, and growth are major actions of any kind of leadership (Aistrup, 2010; Castellon, 2007; Hunter-Heaston, 2010, Williams, 2005). This is especially important for administrators who are met with resistance and negativity from the teachers. My study will provide administrators with suggestions for becoming a more effective school leader through the better understanding of teacher perceptions and thus teacher behavior and actions. In addition, I hope to reaffirm the research of others that perceptions are useful and should be utilized by principals on a regular basis for self-growth and general school improvement.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Central office administrators, such as assistant superintendents for instruction, lead teachers, and department administrators also have the desire to enhance student learning in all schools in their district and help the building administrators become better at facilitating student and teacher growth. The results of this study could be utilized by these people in several ways. Knowledge of how middle school teachers perceive administrators as instructional leaders and instructional leadership could be used to develop staff development workshops at the district level and as springboards for conversations with middle school principals as they strive to meet the goals of their improvement plans. In addition, understanding of middle school teachers' perceptions about middle school issues can facilitate the restructuring of middle school programs and processes so they are more effective.

Brown, Claudet, and Oliverrez (2003) and Adams (2007), claimed that the culture of middle schools is unique in terms of teacher and administrator belief systems, so they are conducive to the exploration of instructional leadership. Middle school teachers have a defined set of perceptions about what they should teach and how they should teach it, as well as what actions each person in a school should perform, which are not easy to change. The NYSED (2001a) states that reform is more about changing perceptions, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and behavior of teachers than it is about adding new programs or structures. Thus, middle school administrators who have a better comprehension of why teacher perceptions are negative can better support their teachers in developing, practicing, and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

maintaining instructional practices to enhance student learning (McEwan, 2000). Similarly, teachers who feel supported by their principal through collaboration, professional development, and participation in teams focused on teaching brought about significant student learning (Castellon, 2007).

Much of the research on instructional leadership has focused only on the instructional leadership of principals, as will be cited in my literature review in Chapter Two. Just a small number of studies address instructional leadership in assistant principals as well, with most only mentioning assistant principals rather than focusing on them solely or even jointly with principals, so this study can add to the knowledge base. Once such study by Petzko (2002) stated that the leadership skills of assistant principals need to be fostered since they are likely to become principals, and school districts must “provide extensive professional development for aspiring principals” (p. 19). Since many assistant principals are the people who will become the principals of tomorrow, it is essential to find out how teachers perceive them as instructional leaders as well and assist them with developing their instructional leadership skills.

Teachers who have negative perceptions of instructional leadership can sabotage and prevent their own growth, their students' progress and growth, and the overall growth and effectiveness of the school as a whole (Manders, 2008). “Not all teachers are ‘ready to learn,’ and willing and able to provide effective instruction and respond to the challenges of a changing and often frustrating environment” (Manders, 2008, p. 10). Bennet, Wise, and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Woods (2003) supported this claim by stating that the lack of teacher growth is counterproductive to a school's mission, and can also be vastly damaging to the culture and climate (as cited in Goslin, 2008). Understanding why some teachers have these negative perceptions can give many benefits to a school community such as facilitating a unified school culture between administrators and teachers, which will impact the classroom in profound ways (Manders, 2008).

Some teachers are hesitant to listen to the advice and ideas of administrators regarding their teaching practices and are opposed to positive systemic and procedural change. According to Manders (2008), "When teachers come to school to teach they want to be independent and be able to 'do their own thing' within their classroom setting (p. 15). This can be the result of a great many influences such as over-confidence, fear of change and the unknown (Manders, 2008), over-dependence on the state curriculum, and unwavering notions of what a principal's job should be. New initiatives and instructional techniques are much more likely to be misused, ignored, or rejected completely by these teachers, which can have an impact on the school's effectiveness. Williamson and Johnston (2000), citing some of their previous studies from 1991 and 1993, asserted that "Resistance to change and disagreement about the impact of school programs is common" (p. 15). They also noted that dissent is rarely based on rational information, data, or what is best for students; instead it is based on feelings and emotions. Goslin (2008) took this one step further, conveying that when teachers do not view change initiatives and curricular or instructional advice as

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

welcome, practical, and sustainable, they will oppose them. Thus, administrators need to have the necessary knowledge to formulate some steps they can take to reduce this opposition and resistance.

In addition, many researchers call for more research on instructional leadership and school leadership in general, research that examines it in a different light and more deeply. For example, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) believe that more qualitative studies of instructional leadership are necessary to give more descriptive reports of the behaviors that are essential to it. Roberts Brailsford (2001) agrees with this, noting that more interviews should be conducted to get clearer pictures of what really goes on in a school. Chappelle & Price (2012) suggested that more studies should be completed that deal with distributed leadership. Marshall (2005) suggested that the degree to which teacher –principal interaction has an effect on perceptions of instructional leadership should be studied.

Given all of the momentous changes in middle school philosophy over the last 50 years or so and the concern over the ability of middle schools to prepare early adolescents for high school, continued research is needed to give guidance to superintendents, principals, and other stakeholders about what works in middle school. This study has the potential to provide insight into how to bring about positive and effective change in middle schools through the influence of teachers. As stated by Ellis (1986), Andrews et. al. (1986) found that “in schools where teachers perceive the principal to be a strong instructional leader, the educational process as a whole is more efficient and students learn more than in schools

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

where the principal is perceived as weak” (p. 4).

### **Overview of Methodological Approach**

With this study I am seeking to have a positive impact on schools, teaching, and students. More specifically, I want to help other administrators, especially those in middle schools, to understand how instructional leadership is viewed by teachers and if these views are negative, why that is so. I do not want to align myself with one particular epistemological theory; instead, I will simply follow the qualitative method of research.

The qualitative approach is appropriate for this study for many reasons. This study relies on the honesty and openness of educators, who above all else, are human, and being human are also complex. Qualitative research is meant to “investigate topics in all their complexity, in context” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 2). The topic I am investigating cannot be easily handled by statistical procedures; it requires rich details about people’s opinions, ideas, practices, and beliefs, which are only achieved through observations, surveys, and interviews. I am not approaching my research with a predetermined theory or hypothesis or trying to prove or disprove anything; instead I want to understand “behavior from the informant’s own frame of reference” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 3) and let the data speak for itself to reveal its secrets and revelations.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Chapter Summary and Organization**

The desire to promote effective and meaningful school improvement through the understanding of teacher perceptions is the motivating factor behind this study. This chapter set the stage for the study and provided the background, problem, purpose, significance, and methodological approach. Chapter Two gives context to the study through relevant research on perceptions, instructional leadership, and middle school theory. Chapter Three describes the methodology that was utilized to discover why some teachers feel negatively about instructional leadership. Chapter four provides the data from the surveys and interviews which were utilized to answer the research questions. Chapter five provides a review of the data, conclusions, suggestions for practice, and recommendations for future research. In addition, the discussion section compares this study to the studies that were cited in my literature review.

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

Chapter One introduced this study by detailing the purposes and significance. In my research I am concerned with finding out what perceptions middle school teachers have of instructional leadership and if those perceptions are negative, why those negative perceptions have occurred. Chapter Two details the topics and literature which enlightened me about the information that has already been discovered by others and how my study can contribute to the general knowledge base. This literature review presented me with a solid foundation for my study and helped me better focus and narrow my design and procedures.

### **Instructional Leadership**

#### **Background.**

The history of research on instructional leadership is an interesting one and lays the groundwork for understanding why it is such a significant and highly explored facet of leadership. The catalyst for research on leadership was the Coleman et. al. (1966) study, as described in Chappelle & Price (2012), which suggested that a student's family and background was the strongest variable in determining success in school and there was little that teachers could do about it. As would be expected, many other researchers wholeheartedly disagreed with this finding and began to study schools with mostly economically

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

disadvantaged students. Many of these follow-up studies revealed that many schools were able to help these students learn, which spurred a multitude of studies on practices that make schools effective (Chappelle & Price, 2012).

Through the 1970s and 1980s, researchers began defining school effectiveness and ways to bring about school improvement. One study posited that effective principals emphasized student achievement (Edmonds, 1979). This study was one of the first to truly specify the principal as the person who is directly responsible for student achievement and instruction in the school (Roberts Brailsford, 2001). As time went on, several models and instruments were created to assess it, such as the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) created by Hallinger & Murphy (1985), and studies that identified instructional leadership and the observable behaviors and practices that characterize it began to appear (Chappelle & Price, 2012). Much of the current research focuses on exploring the instructional leadership practices that are most effective in changing classroom instruction for the better and teachers' perceptions of the behaviors their principal exhibits that demonstrate effective leadership.

The principal as instructional leader has been a frequently studied topic (McCoy & Holt, 2012) and has shed a great deal of light onto school improvement and change efforts as well as on educational leadership in general. Later, researchers took a logical step and became interested in linking "principal instructional leadership to student achievement" (Chappelle & Price, 2012, <http://cnx.org/content/m43620/latest/>) and then shifted to

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

analyzing and quantifying the effects of principal leadership practices that have an impact on student outcomes (Chapellear & Price, 2012). In middle schools, much of the recent research on instructional leadership has focused on assessing teacher perceptions of programs, initiatives, and their principal's leadership style and actions, in addition to realizing best practices.

### **Setting the stage for the current study.**

Thomas Ellis (1986) summarized five studies from the 1980s which addressed instructional leadership. One of these studies was conducted by Richard Andrews et. al. (1986). It was a two-year study in the Seattle Public Schools that investigated the relationship between student achievement and strong instructional leadership. The researchers concluded that student gains in reading and math were consistently higher in schools that had a strong instructional leader (determined from teacher surveys). He concluded that the studies demonstrate that an instructional leader, being a "committed, caring principal" (p. 3) can create and maintain a school where "principal, teachers, and students enthusiastically participate in a common vision of excellence" (p. 3). Another study Ellis recapped was authored by William L. Rutherford et. al. (1983). They posited that instructional interventions or practices that communicate the expectations of the principal and are followed by actions that support, assist, and monitor the interventions are most likely to result in improvement.

Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) study of instructional leadership in high-income

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

schools verses low-income schools found that instructional leadership can be passive or involved. Instructional leaders in high-income schools lead more positively from the background and functioned more as coordinators, whereas instructional leaders in low-income schools were much more involved in the organizational side of things and displayed more direct control over instruction. In other words, they were more involved with the students and viewed as stronger instructional leaders as a result. However, it's interesting to note that instructional leadership was just as important in both types of schools, regardless of the specific form it took and the administrator actions that were required.

Most researchers include a long list of recommendations for further research, but don't include a long list of recommendations for future practice. However, one dissertation I located conducted by Aistrup (2010), lead to the creation of a guidebook for administrators that lists specific actions that can be taken to improve school conditions and show effective instructional leadership. She developed the guidebook to help administrators "transform their skills and practices as they influence the behavior, beliefs, and norms of the school community" (p. 7). She also discussed facilitating the change process in schools, but did not specifically touch on how to change teachers' perceptions in order to initiate change.

### **Perceptions of instructional leadership.**

Today, instructional leadership continues to be a highly popular topic for dissertations and other research, and there is a great deal of existing research on instructional leadership including; definitions, what teachers and administrators believe it is, and what skills and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

actions make it possible. However, for the purposes of this study, my desire is to go beyond the basics of instructional leadership to find out if teachers perceive it in negative ways and why this pessimism exists. Although I didn't come across any studies that truly addressed this, a few of the studies I read explored the notion of instructional leadership in diverse ways.

Nearly all of the studies I read utilized multiple choice questionnaires and/or interviews as the data gathering tools. The study by Manders (2009) instead utilized open-ended or short answer questions. The responses showed that teachers have "high yet realistic expectations of an effective leader" (p. 87). Many instructional behaviors were also noted, such as helping improve classroom practices, being visible, assisting with difficulties with parents and students, and responding to concerns and needs.

Pulleyn (2012) saw a lack of research in the area of leadership and school climate. Her quantitative study yielded interesting results. Similar to other researchers, Pulleyn found that there is a strong positive correlation between the care and concern principals give teachers and the commitment of teachers. When she examined gender, she found that "male teachers perceived their principals as more restrictive than female teachers" (Pulleyn, 2012, p. 93), and age analysis revealed that the younger teachers had more positive perceptions of their principals than the older teachers. However, at the same time, the younger teachers also perceived their principals as more restrictive. The young teachers feel that they were not praised enough and there were too many mandated programs. Pulleyn concluded that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

“teachers’ perceptions of principal behaviors were related to the perceptions of school climate” (p. 99).

In a study by Kolsky (2009), the research questions were “What do teachers claim that principals do that cause them to change their instructional practices?” and “What are the commonalities and differences across principal and teacher claims of effective instructional leadership?” (p. 3). The teachers in her study stated that principal leadership is more positively viewed when teachers are genuinely involved, the principal is a good motivator, highly visible, and displays trustworthiness, teachers are viewed as competent and knowledgeable, and teachers are given the resources and supports to make the required changes. These findings are similar to those found by Rutherford et. al. (1983). McCoy & Holt (2012) established similar results; teachers felt that being given time to collaborate and work together was a sign of strong instructional leadership and allowed them to make a difference in the students’ lives. They also found that the teachers with positive views of their administrators’ leadership felt a strong sense of teamwork in their schools.

In her study on teacher perceptions of instructional leadership and implementation of reading interventions, Castellon (2007) found that a majority of the teachers utilized the prescribed reading program with fidelity because it was a joint decision to adopt it and the principal provided for ongoing training and collaborative planning. In her 2008 study, Goslin learned that the teachers felt that administrators should have a command of subject matter and curriculum that is above theirs, recognize staff for the instructional successes they

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

have, and communicate the relevance of change initiatives in order to be viewed as instructional leaders. Another study similarly determined that teachers have a more positive view of instructional leadership if they feel important (Flamini, 2010). These three studies suggest that teachers' perceptions may be able to be altered by including them in decisions and keeping the lines of communication open.

Kolsky (2009) suggested that teacher perceptions of instructional leadership are not as vastly different from those of principals as one might think, and found that there was often 50% or greater agreement between teachers and administrators on administrator actions that constitute instructional leadership and facilitate change in their performance. Some of the lower rated actions, meaning that teachers felt they were not related to instructional leadership and had little effect on their practices, were being goal oriented and holding teachers accountable for all results. Kolsky could not account for these findings. A similar study conducted by Giannangelo and Malone (1987) found that most of the teachers stated that instructional leadership was the most important role of the principal, which was in agreement with the principals' statements. However, it was emphasized that the teachers expressed a disparity between what the principals said and what they actually did day to day. The teachers noted that the administrators were too concerned with administrative issues instead of academic matters, almost to the point of ignoring the true purpose of the school; educating the students.

Through detailed surveys, Kaster (2010) discovered that teacher leaders view

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

administrator collaboration with teachers, setting clear expectations, communication of the big picture of what can be accomplished, provision of resources, and ensuring meaningful staff development as some of the most important instructional leadership actions. He also discovered that there were many instructional leadership actions that were not viewed as meaningful to the teachers, such as monitoring the teacher groups and relationships in the school, examining lesson plans to ensure curriculum fidelity, keeping teachers engaged during break or non-instructional times, and becoming directly involved in the instruction of the students (such as by tutoring or teaching classes).

Roesner & Sloan (1987) concluded that principals have different perceptions of their own leadership style than their teachers do. They either rated themselves as more competent than the teachers did or stated that they performed tasks that the teachers felt they didn't perform. Another study conducted by Keiser and Shen (2000) found that regarding perceptions of teacher empowerment, principals perceive that teachers are much more empowered than the teachers themselves do. The teachers felt that they have little influence on the school budget, hiring, and teacher evaluation. Karakose (2007) did a study of ethical leadership, and discovered that while principals believe they are acting ethically, the teachers rated them poorly on ethical behaviors such as self-evaluation, being truthful, and protecting the rights of others.

A study conducted in a Portuguese school by Pashiardis, Costa, Mendes, and Ventura (2005), found that in general the teachers and principal had similar perceptions of the

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

principal as leader, but in one category, promoting discussion of important issues and encouraging shared decision-making to find a solution, they were in disagreement. The teachers saw this as the principal's weakest area, while the principal rated himself quite highly in this area. One more study that found perceptual differences between the teachers and principals was done by Anfara Jr., Patterson, Buehler, Gearity (2006). Their results were "administrators consistently scored each of the 19 items higher than did the teachers" (p. 290). The principals rated themselves higher concerning involvement in the school improvement process, providing school-based staff development focused on the schools goals and needs, and familiarity with the Tennessee model for school improvement planning; all of which are facets of instructional leadership. There was a statistical difference in 14 of the 19 items.

I could not locate any studies that probed why many teachers do not see their administrators as instructional leaders, why this occurs, and the impact of this on the school environment. However, there were some studies that addressed some of these elements. One of them, a dissertation by Castellon (2007), discovered that the kindergarten teachers, who used only the optional core reading materials, rated their principal lower in terms of providing support, providing an appropriate model, and articulating vision. The teachers rebelled against utilizing the mandated reading program, which had an impact on many aspects of the school's culture and cohesiveness and possibly in the long term, student achievement. Another study, by Knight (2000), recounted that the teachers in his study had a

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

“historical belief that professional development is impractical” (p. 9) because they were told to attend sessions rather than being allowed to choose to attend them, and felt that their administrators utilized too much top-down decision making. Thus, the staff development training was not effective because the teachers did not buy into it. They saw their administrators as managerial leaders rather than instructional leaders. An interesting study by Barnett and McCormick (2004) unearthed the finding that “The variation in teachers’ perceptions of leadership occurred at the teacher level” (p. 427). They clarified that this means that each teacher perceives his or her principal uniquely and independently; the views of others or groups within the school had little or no impact.

Dennis (2009), utilizing a modified form of the PIMRS created by Dr. Phillip Hallinger, found that teachers and principals had similar perceptions of instructional leadership behaviors that were performed at their schools. The teachers indicated that their principals displayed the following behaviors the most often; effectively communicate the school’s mission to all stakeholders, discuss the school’s academic goals at staff meetings with the entire faculty, and use school-wide testing results to make curricular decisions. Most importantly, she deduced that the principals rated themselves higher than the teachers did overall, which mirrors the results of several of the other studies in this literature review.

Dennis (2009) also noticed that there was no significant correlation between perceptions and student achievement in her study. In contrast, Chappelle & Price (2012) noted that there is a relationship between teachers’ perceptions of instructional leadership and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

student achievement. This further denotes the need for further studies and more knowledge about how the perceptions of teachers impact students. It is my hope that this study helps us take one step closer to that goal.

A great deal has been learned about instructional leadership regarding how teachers' perceptions are formed, how instructional leadership impacts student learning, and how teacher perceptions either differ or equal the perceptions of administrators. There is also ample evidence from this literature review to demonstrate that the perceptions teachers have are incredibly influential. It is worth it to understand these perceptions better in order to create some strategies to improve and utilize them in constructive ways to influence school culture and student learning for the better. Meyer and VanHoose (1981) also believed this to be true; teamwork, resulting in positive school change and student achievement, can be facilitated "if there is an understanding between teachers and administrators of one another's perceptions even if these perceptions are different" (p. 72). I believe that there are new revelations into teachers' perceptions and ideas to help principals become better instructional leaders and improve teacher perceptions of instructional leadership yet to be discovered.

### **Middle school research.**

Fewer studies have addressed teacher perceptions of instructional leadership specifically in middle schools. Some of the most significant studies were discussed in this section. The majority of the research I located focused on the effectiveness of middle schools, how middle schools can become more effective, and what practices lead to student

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

success at the middle school level. Others concentrated on other areas of leadership, such as transformational and managerial, but only a few concentrated on instructional leadership.

As I conducted my literature review, I stumbled upon one study conducted by Marshall (2005) that is very similar to this study. She examined the differences in perceptions of instructional leadership between middle school principals and teachers using Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) PIMRS. Her conclusions were that there was no general statistical difference between the perceptions of the teachers and the principals; although she did find a significant difference in teacher and principal responses on two of the individual questions. When comparing high performing and low performing schools, she found a significant difference in the sub categories of Coordinating the Curriculum and Promoting Professional Development. In addition, Marshall discovered seven statistical differences between the perceptions of middle school teachers and principals and high school teachers and principals.

A different study conducted by O'Donnell, White, and George (2005), found that middle school teachers' perceptions of the principal's instructional leadership abilities were a predictor of student achievement. This gives more credence to the results found in the Andrews et. al. study conducted in 1986. A study by Roberts Brailsford (2001) examined middle school teachers' perceptions of effective school leadership characteristics and also sought to find out if middle school teachers perceive effective instructional strategies in their principals; modeling effective instructional practices, encouraging the best middle school

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

practices, and creating opportunities for discussion in order to facilitate student achievement.

Her results were that “teachers do perceive that middle school principals display leadership behavior that empirical studies have proven to be germane to the success of effective school leadership” (p. 115). School size and teacher’s level of education had the most influence over teacher perceptions than any other factors, but conversely, unalterable characteristics of the principal, such as age and gender, had little bearing on perceptions. She concluded that teacher characteristics are much more influential on perceptions than principal characteristics. For example, the age of the teacher had a great impact on perceptions; the older teachers had more negative perceptions of the principal’s leadership behaviors than the younger teachers.

In their longitudinal study called *Improving Middle School Climate Through Teacher-Centered Change*, Rhodes, Camic, Milburn and Lowe (2009) discovered that their teacher empowerment intervention was successful in strengthening the teachers’ perceptions of the administration over the four year period of the study. Conversely, in the control schools, teacher perceptions and attitudes toward the school leadership actually declined. Meyer and VanHoose (1981) cited that there was a statistical difference between the perceptions of the teachers and the principals regarding instructional leadership in their study. “The startling conclusion that one draws from the data is...that what principals perceive themselves doing and what teachers perceive principals to be doing is drastically different” (p. 69).

Coffin (2008) found that the principals agreed that instructional leadership has

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

become the key role of a principal, but it is not often the primary role because other demands and responsibilities come up. The teachers, on the other hand, indicated the exact opposite; instructional leadership should not be the primary role of the principal. Her results led her to hypothesize “that there may be a disconnection between the principal’s work and the many different roles encompassed in the position, and what teachers want or see the role of the principal to be” (p. 112). She also stated that the roles of advocate and collaborator are very important to the teachers, and that the teachers in her study had an ‘us vs. them’ mentality which determined their perceptions of the principal.

These studies are important to my study because they reveal insights into how middle school teachers think and view instructional leadership. Oftentimes, teacher and principal perceptions differ. It is clear that the teachers in these studies wanted their principals to be highly involved in the instructional process, but the years of experience of the teacher definitely had an effect on the degree of this. Teachers seem to have more positive perceptions when they are more actively engaged in the problem-solution process and feel valued by their principal. I was interested in finding out if this would be true with my participants as well.

### **Assistant principals.**

The role of assistant principal arose at the turn of the century to help manage the ever increasing student enrollment in the secondary schools (Hooley & Marshall, 2006). As a result, the role and duties were not clearly defined (Coleman, 2007). As time has elapsed and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

the educational system has evolved, so has the role of assistant principal. When researchers began to study them, they usually focused on what assistant principals do on a day to day basis (Celikten, 2001) or what they should do. "There has not been any extensive research carried out on the instructional leadership responsibilities of the assistant principals" (Celikten, 2001, p. 2). Other studies targeted preparation programs, how superintendents can recruit and employ high quality administrators, and retention of assistant principals. In the last 30 years or so, researchers have begun to address how the role of the assistant principal should be redefined and restructured, but have not shed a great deal of new light on assistant principals' use of instructional leadership and teachers' perceptions of it.

Generally, most of the studies I read established that assistant principals were not involved in instructional leadership much or even at all, such as the study by Wells et. al. (1999), and focused on making recommendations about what they should do to become instructional leaders. "To a great degree, principals and other educators view the assistant principal's role as non instructional" (Kaplan & Owings, 1999, p. 82). Kaplan and Owings (1999) also stated that principals may not utilize the role of assistant principal effectively. Thus, there is a widespread call for more research (Anderson, 1987; Celikten, 2001; Coleman, 2007; Kaplan & Owings, 1999). Chappelle and Price (2012) echoed the need for more studies involving assistant principals when they suggested that future studies examine the extent to which other staff members are involved in instructional leadership.

Hooley and Marshall's (2006) study proposed that the responsibilities of an assistant

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

principal are rarely consistent, well-defined, or described, and there are many grey areas, or tasks that become an assistant principal's responsibility as a result of or in response to something else. In addition, Celikten (2001) noted that assistant principals are often expected to do whatever is needed to be done, which frequently takes them away from instructional tasks. Harvey and Sheridan (1995) took this notion one step further and asserted that assistant principals "typically have a broad range of responsibilities which are decided by the principal" (p. 69). As cited in a study by Scoggins and Bishop (1993), Kelly (1987) supported this statement when he concluded that "the assistant principal's position is essentially one of helping the principal by sharing the load, freeing him or her to be the instructional leader of the school" (p. 13). If principals do delegate duties of an instructional nature to their assistant principals, there is little chance that they will be able to perform them at all. Lindley's (1998) remarkable study supports this statement; he found that assistant principals would like to have more control over people and events in the school than they do and often resent the fact that certain tasks require permission or delegation from the principal.

Fewer studies exist that asked for teacher and/or assistant principal perceptions of instructional leadership (Anderson, 1987). One study I came across by Celikten (2001) explored the perceptions of high school principals and yielded some interesting results. The assistant principals in the study noted many factors that hindered their ability to be instructional leaders such as lack of role description, performing a large number and range of

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

duties, school politics, not being able to attend professional development workshops, and dealing with student discipline. Some of the participants stated that a description of their duties did actually exist, but did not include anything that would be considered under the realm of instructional leadership.

Anderson (1987) uncovered that the teachers did not view the assistant principals as being involved in instructional tasks. Other tasks that rated low included hiring of personnel and presenting information to students and parents. Roles that the teachers felt the assistant principals were highly involved in included handling discipline issues, allocating materials, and personnel evaluation. As additional researchers have done, they called for more defined job descriptions and an even distribution of instructional duties. Brown's (2001) results were parallel; teachers felt that assistant principals handled discipline most often and this should change to make them more integral to the change and instructional process.

Williams (1995) found that there was a great deal of agreement between teachers and assistant principals regarding the roles of assistant principals, although two significant differences occurred; teachers did not agree that analysis and interpretation of data and assisting with the placement of students are part of the assistant principal's duties. There was also some disagreement regarding the assistant principal being involved with supervision of teachers and the review of lesson plans. Overall, the quantitative analysis revealed statistical differences between the assistant principals' and teachers' views of instructional tasks as well as administrative tasks. "For every instructional and administrative task item, the assistant

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

principals had a higher mean score than the teachers” (Williams, 1995, p. 51). The study by Kohl (1992) lead to similar results. There were differences in perceptions of the competencies that assistant principals must demonstrate; principals found 20 of the 60 individual items more important than the teachers did, seven of which revolved around student services specifically. Thus, position had an effect on perceptions. She also found that school size and gender affected perceptions; in larger schools the principals didn't feel the need for their assistant principals to have competence in instructional leadership, and females saw the position in a less traditional way and believed that reform regarding the assistant principal's role is needed.

A doctoral dissertation by Harllee (1988) also implied that there is disagreement between assistant principals and teachers, assistant principals and principals, and principals and teachers regarding the responsibilities of an assistant principal. The greatest difference was found between the assistant principals and teachers. The assistant principals felt that they have more responsibilities than the principals did, with business management being the area in which they had the least responsibility. The teachers saw the principals as having more responsibilities in the school than the assistant principals. However, the most intriguing conclusion that Harllee made was in reference to instructional tasks; she proposed that assistant principals have a lot of responsibility in this area, which is contrary to the results of most other studies I read.

Other studies explored assistant principals and instructional leadership in diverse

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

ways. For example, one study showed that assistant principals spend much of their time consumed with managerial duties such as discipline, monitoring students, and handling transportation issues which hinders their preparation for and ability to secure a principalship (Bowen, Chan, & Webb, 2003; Petzko, 2002). However, they also noted that assistant principals want to perform instructional tasks and believe that these are the type of tasks that they should be performing more often. In addition, it was suggested that researchers do not agree that the position of assistant principal is a natural progression to the position of principal, and some believe that it is not a position in its own right. The authors concluded that assistant principals do not view managerial tasks as a part of the roles of a principal, but rate instructional and curricular supports as the most important. Hooley and Marshall (2006) and Smith (1987) conveyed this as well; assistant principals experience a great deal of role conflict when they have to perform tasks that interfere with the type of work they truly value.

Zeitoun and Newton (2002) provided multiple alternative models for school leadership; allow assistant principals to be more involved in instructional leadership, supply assistant principals or other personnel for that purpose (for example designating an assistant principal for instruction), or furnish a school with two principals. Each model had both advantages and disadvantages, and it was made clear that success of the model depended on the principal. This seems to be a recurring theme when discussing assistant principals; the principal determines everything.

Oliver's (2005) three-year longitudinal study established that professional

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

development for assistant principals is mainly focused on “management items” (p. 5) rather than on instructional items. As a result, he strongly suggested that “professional development must be provided for assistant principals on a continuous basis; one shot sessions without substantive content or application need to be avoided” (Oliver, 2005, p. 9). This echoes findings in the research about professional development for teachers concluded by Knight in 2000. Smith (1987) also stated that professional development is crucial for assistant principals and is something that assistant principals feel is important to them.

Clearly, research about assistant principals as instructional leaders is not comprehensive in the literature. “The deputy principalship remains one of the least understood roles in the schools of the contemporary education system” (Harvey & Sheridan, 1995, p. 89). It was interesting that many of the studies I read implied that assistant principals want to be more involved in instructional tasks (Celikten, 2001; Coleman, 2007; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Kohl, 1992; Zeitoun & Newton, 2002) and a majority of the studies were carried out in high schools. It is evident that there is a need for more information in this area, and this study will begin to fill in some of these gaps.

### **Summary.**

Overall, the studies that I read and cited in this literature review on instructional leadership, although not all-inclusive, were very enlightening and shed a great deal of light on my study. The exploration of instructional leadership has morphed over the last 40 years and will continue to do so as the concepts of schooling and educational leadership grow.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Strong instructional leadership sets the tone and direction for superior and effective teaching (Aistrup, 2010; Sanzo et. al., 2011). Many studies began to discover the relationship between student achievement and strong instructional leadership. This is pertinent to my study because teacher perceptions can influence student learning (Andrews et. al., 1986; O'Donnell et. al., 2005) and ultimately a school's culture and effectiveness, so more research is definitely needed to support current findings and extend them to uncover new ones. Kolsky's (2009) and Aistrup's (2010) research studies are springboards for this inquiry. Kolsky found that there are certain conditions and aspects of a school's culture that facilitate affirmative perceptions of instructional leadership, and other studies found that a teacher's perceptions can often be the same as administrators'. It is my hope that this study will add to the current literature and go a step further by providing insight into why negative perceptions persist.

### **Perceptual Theory**

A large proportion of the research on school leadership is conducted through the perceptions, or views, of teachers. This is because leadership is more accurately described, defined, and measured through perceptions of the people who are affected by and witnesses to it (Roberts Brailsford, 2001). Obviously, perceptions are viewed as reliable and appropriate mechanisms for understanding by researchers. Accordingly, perceptions are the cornerstone of this study as well, and I expected them to shed light on instructional

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

leadership and how principals can apply instructional leadership strategies in their schools with more success.

There are four basic theories of perception in psychology. *Naïve Realism* states that we perceive things as they are, such as taste, smell, color, texture, and sound. No thinking or beliefs are interjected. *Representative Realism* suggests that we are actively involved in perception; we interpose our own experiences, previous learning, opinions, and preconceived notions to discount, replace, or integrate new information. *Idealism* states “to be is to be perceived, objects are nothing more than our experiences of them”

(<http://www.theoryofknowledge.info/theories-of-perception/idealism/>, para. 1). In other words, an object that is not perceived does not exist; perception is everything.

*Phenomenalism* is a weaker form of Idealism that suggests that “objects exist insofar either as they are perceived or as it is possible to perceive them”

(<http://www.theoryofknowledge.info/theories-of-perception/phenomenalism/>, para. 3). For this study, Naïve Realism and Representative Realism apply since the perceptions I have studied have to do with a person's actions and behaviors rather than with objects.

Perceptions are central to research for many reasons. Perceptions allow us to connect to the world around us, give us information, allow us to think abstractly, and are context sensitive. They are influenced by and dependent upon knowledge, thoughts, and expectations. As we interact with other people and the world around us, we automatically begin searching for the best interpretation of the data we have been presented, thus forming

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

perceptions. Perceptions are closely related to our senses because we derive and form our perceptions from what we hear, see, smell, feel, and taste (cog.mgmt.stevens-tech.edu/~yasu/courses/175/notes/perception1.pdf). For example, a teacher may perceive that his principal is ineffective based on the fact that the principal made a particular statement at a staff meeting or acted a certain way in front of him. Perceptions allow us to construct information from our encounters with other people, and help us evaluate and categorize the conduct and actions of ourselves and others. However, the value and accuracy of these perceptions is not known and often disregarded.

In their pivotal study, Lord et. al., (1986) discussed two ways that perceptions of leaders form. The first is through new information entering into the long-term memory, where ideas and observations that are new are compared with those that have already been processed and stored and are a part of the person's belief system. The second way is through new information and observations being judged on the extent to which they influenced outcomes. Both of these methods happen constantly, often subconsciously, and result in positive or negative perceptions depending on the content of the new information that enters the brain.

Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) take this one step further, explaining that there are two categories of information that contribute to perceptions; *alterable* and *unalterable*. *Alterable* variables are those that come from in school and out of school, or from environments. In a school the alterable variables are comprised of anything associated with the school; such as

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

mission, goals, policies, culture, programs, instructional practices, systems, and structure.

Out of school alterable variables are things that are associated with entities outside of the school; the school district, state education department, and other community agencies.

*Unalterable* variables are demographic or other characteristics which we have no control over, such as school size and location and the age and gender of the teachers and administrators. Jantzi and Leithwood noted that the number of students/school size and the number of years a teacher has been at the school have particular affect on teacher perceptions. Teachers who have been at a school longer tend to view instructional leadership more positively, and teachers in smaller schools have more opportunities to observe their principal's actions and thus form more constructive perceptions about them. These findings intrigued me and lead me to question whether my study would lead to similar results.

The results of Jantzi and Leithwood's (1996) quantitative study are as follows. Alterable and unalterable variables accounted for 54% of the total variation in teachers' leadership perceptions; 46% alterable and 8% unalterable. Thus, alterable variables were much more impactful on a teacher's perceptions. However, within the alterable variables there was no variation. School size and level explained the most variation, but teacher variables explained the least. In school variables explained 35% of the variation, but out of school variables did not have any significant influence on teachers' perceptions. Basically, they found that what principals do has a much bigger influence on perceptions than anything else.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

One of the main reasons that I chose to investigate middle school teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership in this study was because I believe that these perceptions dictate teachers' practices and willingness, or lack thereof, to alter them. So, administrators need to be acutely aware of perceptions when making plans to make school improvements or those improvements will ultimately fail (Collins, 2008; Meyer & VanHoose, 1981). Hoerr (2005) supports this in his article *Perception is Reality*. He stated that principals should frequently gather perceptions about their performance and next steps because it is well known that at least one person's perceptions will be in disagreement with our own. "When leaders implement a decision under the illusion that they know everyone's perceptions, they can make critical mistakes" (p. 82).

On the other hand, perceptions, which are closely related to attitudes, are more often than not exceedingly limiting and very different from reality (Pickens, 2005). "Individuals will select the stimuli that satisfy their immediate needs (perceptual vigilance) and may disregard stimuli that may cause psychological anxiety (perceptual defense)" (Pickens, 2005, p. 54). This happens a lot in schools; teachers often make decisions about their administrators based on perceptions that are incomplete or based on false information. There are many more possibilities or conclusions than we sometimes perceive, and perceptions are subject to the influence of our culture, experiences, biases, expectations, morals, colleagues, and beliefs ([cog.mgmt.stevens-tech.edu/~yasu/courses/175/notes/perception1.pdf](http://cog.mgmt.stevens-tech.edu/~yasu/courses/175/notes/perception1.pdf)).

Pickens (2005) further affirms that "People are selective in what they perceive and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

tend to filter information based on the capacity to absorb new data, combined with preconceived thoughts” (p. 56). Perceptions can form in very short periods of time, but often take a long time to alter, and this process can be very difficult to achieve. Thus, they are not a be-all-end-all and need to be analyzed and utilized with a bit of discretion; they can be helpful, but should be employed in conjunction with other strategies and data.

### **Summary.**

From these studies, one can come to the conclusion that perceptions are very powerful and exert a huge influence on educational practices and norms. The fact that teachers do not usually see what the principal does on a daily basis, the tendency of principals to inflate their accomplishments and performance, the complexity of interpersonal relationships, and a lack of understanding of leadership by teachers can have a huge impact on teacher perceptions in schools (Meyer & VanHoose, 1981). An important question comes to mind as well, “What are the consequences that result in schools when some teacher’s perceptions are altered and others are not?” This would be a great question for a longitudinal study.

### **Gathering teacher perceptions in North Carolina.**

Many states and school districts across the country, responding to innovative research on the importance and power of teacher perceptions, have implemented a formal and standardized way to ascertain the perceptions of teachers on the effectiveness of their principal’s leadership. North Carolina has been utilizing data from its Teacher Working

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Conditions Survey (TWC) since 2002, which was the first year that any state in the nation began conducting a statewide survey of educators (<http://stateboard.ncpublicschools.gov/chairmans-blog/20120322>). It was originally piloted in 2001 by the North Carolina Professional Teacher Standards Commission (Banks, Bodkin, & Heissel, 2011). The state believes that the TWC has an impact on student achievement and strengthens teacher retention efforts because it results in meaningful school/district improvement ([ncteachingconditions.org](http://ncteachingconditions.org)).

The TWC “has a long-standing tradition of giving teachers a voice in policymaking at the school, district, and state levels” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, <http://stateboard.ncpublicschools.gov/chairmans-blog/20120322>, para 1) and is given every two years in every school in the state. The TWC is taken online and assesses teachers’, as well as administrators’, perceptions on topics such as planning time, new teacher support, teacher retention, school leadership, school climate and facilities, resources needed, school discipline, and professional development. The most recent survey asked for opinions about teacher/administrator evaluation systems because that was a current issue and topic of conversation in the state. The results of the TWC are utilized to make changes at the school, district, and state levels. The state prides itself on having at least an 88% participation rate state wide each year. The TWC helps North Carolina educational leaders know what is working and what needs to be improved, so changes have more of a chance of being successful and making a difference (<http://stateboard.ncpublicschools.gov/chairmans->

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

blog/20120322).

The TWC is administered through the New Teacher Center, which is a non-profit organization. In conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Public Education (NCDPI), the New Teacher Center posts the results for each school online via the TWC website and provides school personnel with guides for using the data for school improvement. The reports include general trends as well as “analysis of trends in the data related to student achievement, teacher retention, new teacher support, and persistently low-performing schools” (NCDPI, <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/newsroom/news/2011-12/20120607-01>, para 6). Each school in the state is required to create a School Improvement Plan (SIP) which has to incorporate data from the TWC.

The TWC begins by asking for demographic information such as position held, how many years in education, and years at current school. An example of the current TWC is given below; due to formatting restraints, the order of the questions is different but the questions are the same. The instrument changes slightly each time it is given because new questions are added based on current issues or problems in the state or new programs that have been implemented in the state. In the last few years, many districts/states have begun to capture similar in depth data from teachers in order to improve their educational practices.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

**Figure 2.1 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, adapted from  
[http://www.ncteachingconditions.org/sites/default/files/attachments/  
NC12\\_survey\\_main.pdf](http://www.ncteachingconditions.org/sites/default/files/attachments/NC12_survey_main.pdf)**

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

<b>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the use of time in your school.</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.					
Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.					
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruption.					
The non-instructional time in my school is sufficient.					
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are expected to do.					
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.					
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.					

<b>In the average week, how much time do you devote to the following activities during the school day?</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Individual planning time					
Collaborative planning time					
Supervisory duties					
Required committee or staff meetings					
Communicating with parents/community					
Addressing student discipline issues					
Professional development					
Preparation for federal, state, and local assessments					
Delivery of assessments					
Utilizing results of assessments					

<b>In the past 2 years have you had 10 clock hours or more of professional development in any of the following areas?</b>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Your content area		
Common Core Standards		
Student assessment		
Differentiating instruction		
Special education		
English Language Learners		
Closing the Achievement Gap		
Methods of teaching		
Reading strategies		
Integrating technology into instruction		
Classroom management techniques		

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

<b>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school's facilities and resources.</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Teachers have appropriate access to instructional materials.					
Teachers have appropriate access to instructional technology.					
Teachers have appropriate access to communication technology.					
Teachers have appropriate access to office supplies and equipment.					
Teachers have sufficient access to a broad range of professional support personnel.					
The school environment is clean and well maintained.					
Teachers have adequate space to work productively.					
The physical environment of the classrooms supports learning and teaching.					
The reliability of Internet connections in the school is sufficient to support instructional practices.					

<b>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about community support and involvement in your school.</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Parents/guardians are influential decision-makers at the school.					
This school maintains clear two-way communication with the community.					
The school does a good job of encouraging parental involvement.					
Teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning.					
Parents/guardians know what's going on in the school.					
Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.					
Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.					
The community we serve is supportive of the school.					

**In the average week of teaching how many hours do you spend on school-related activities outside of the regular school or work day?**

- None
- Less than or = to 1 hour
- More than 1 hour but less or = to 3 hours
- More than 3 hours but less or = to 5 hours
- More than 5 hours but less or = to 10 hours
- More than 10 hours

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

<b>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about managing student conduct at your school.</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Students at this school understand the expectations for their conduct.					
Students at this school follow the rules of conduct.					
Policies and procedures about student conduct are clearly understood by the faculty.					
School administrators consistently enforce the rules for student conduct.					
School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.					
Teachers consistently enforce the rules for student conduct.					
The faculty works in a school environment that is safe.					

<b>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about teacher leadership in the school.</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Teachers are recognized as educational experts.					
Teachers are trusted to make sound educational decisions about instruction.					
Teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues.					
Teachers are encouraged to participate in leadership roles.					
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.					
In this school we take steps to solve problems.					
Teachers are effective leaders at this school.					

**Members of the School Improvement Team are elected.**

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

**Overall, the additional support I received as a new teacher has helped me to impact my students' learning.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

<b>Please indicate the role teachers have at your school in each of the following areas.</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Selecting materials and resources					
Devising teaching techniques.					
Setting student grading and assessment practices.					
Determining the content of in-house professional development programs					
Establishing student discipline procedures.					
Providing input on how the school budget will be spent.					
The selection of new teachers to the school.					
School improvement planning.					
Teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making at this school.					

<b>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about school leadership at your school.</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
The faculty and leadership have a shared vision.					
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect at this school.					
Teachers feel comfortable raising concerns and issues that are important to them.					
The school leadership consistently supports teachers.					
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.					
The school leadership facilitates the use of data to improve student learning.					
Teacher performance is assessed objectively.					
Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.					
The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.					
The school improvement team provides leadership at this school.					
The faculty is recognized for their accomplishments.					

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

<b>The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about:</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Leadership issues					
Facilities and resources					
The use of time in my school					
Professional development					
Teacher leadership					
Community support and involvement					
Managing student behavior					
Instructional practices and support					
New teacher support					

<b>Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about professional develop at your school.</b>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
Sufficient resources are available.					
An appropriate amount of time is devoted to it.					
Professional development offerings are data driven.					
They are aligned with the school improvement plan.					
It is differentiated to meet the needs of teachers.					
It deepens teachers' content knowledge.					
There is sufficient training to utilize technology.					
Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice.					
In this school, follow up is provided for professional development.					
Provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.					
It is evaluated and the results are communicated to the teachers.					
It enhances teachers' ability to implement instructional strategies that meet the diverse needs of students.					
It enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.					

**Which aspect of your teaching conditions most affects your willingness to keep teaching at your school?**

- Facilities and resources
- Community support and involvement
- Managing student conduct
- Teacher leadership
- School leadership
- Professional development
- Instructional practices and support

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

In which of the following areas do you need professional development to teach your students more effectively?	Yes	No
Your content area		
Common Core Standards		
Student assessment		
Differentiating instruction		
Special education		
English Language Learners		
Closing the Achievement Gap		
Methods of teaching		
Reading strategies		
Integrating technology into instruction		
Classroom management techniques		

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about instructional practices and support.	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.					
Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.					
Teachers use assessment data in their instruction.					
The curriculum is aligned with the Common Core in this school.					
Teachers work in Professional Learning Communities.					
Provided supports translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers.					
Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction.					
Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.					
Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery.					
State assessments provide schools with data that can help improve teaching.					
State assessments accurately gauge students' understanding of standards.					

**Which of the following best describes your personal professional plans?**

- Continue teaching at my current school.
- Continue teaching in this district but leave this school.
- Continue teaching in this state but leave this district.
- Continue working in this state but pursue an administrative position.
- Continue working in this state but pursue a non-administrative position.
- Leave education entirely.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

**Which aspect of your teaching conditions is most important to you in promoting student learning?**

- Time during the work day
- Facilities and resources
- Community support and involvement
- Managing student conduct
- Teacher leadership
- School leadership
- Professional development
- Instructional practices and support

**Overall my school is a good place to work and learn.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know

**At this school we use the results from the most recent TWC as a tool for school improvement.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know

<b>As a beginning teacher, I have received the following supports.</b>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Formally assigned mentor		
Seminars designed for new teachers		
Reduced workload		
Common planning time with other teachers		
Formal time to meet with mentor during school hours		
Orientation for new teachers		
Access to Professional Learning Communities		
Regular communication with principal, other administrator, or department chair		
Other		
I received no support as a new teacher.		

**Overall, the additional support I received as a new teacher improved my instructional practice.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

<b>On average, how often did you engage in the following activities with your mentor?</b>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Less than once per month</i>	<i>Once per month</i>	<i>Several times per month</i>	<i>Once per week</i>
Developing lesson plans					
Being observed by my mentor teacher					
Observing my mentor's teaching					
Analyzing student work					
Reviewing results of assessments					
Addressing student or classroom behavioral issues					
Reflecting on the effectiveness of my teaching together					
Aligning my lesson planning with state and local curriculum					
Other					

<b>How much did the support you received from your mentor influence your practice in the following areas?</b>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Hardly at all</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Quite a bit</i>	<i>A great deal</i>
Instructional strategies					
The subject I teach					
Classroom management strategies					
Using data to identify student needs					
Differentiating instruction					
Creating a supportive, equitable classroom where differences are valued					
Enlisting help of parents, community, and family members					
Working collaboratively with other teachers in my school					
Connecting with key professionals					
Complying with policies and procedures					
Completing administrative paperwork					
Providing emotional support					
Other					

<b>Please indicate whether the following were true for you and your mentor.</b>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
My mentor and I were in the same building.		
My mentor and I taught in the same content area.		
My mentor and I taught the same grade level.		

**Overall, the additional support I received as a new teacher has been important in my decision to continue teaching at this school.**

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Teacher Resistance**

The main goal of this study is to explore negative teacher perceptions of instructional leadership and why they occur. To this end, it is also imperative to investigate and discuss resistance since pessimistic perceptions often lead to resistance. Resistance is a natural response to anxiety, fear, the unknown, and sheer dread (Hjelle, 2001). There are a great number of uncertainties that come with educational changes, and those uncertainties bring about feelings of stress and apprehension in many teachers. In response, perceptions are created which help teachers deal with the changes, but at the same time can cause them to resist the changes to reduce any further uncertainty (Lord et. al., 1986). These perceptions can also contribute to a feeling a lack of power, which again can lead to resistance.

Sarason (1971), as cited in Hjelle (2001), noted that when a change is instituted, something that was regular or familiar is eliminated by necessity. That adds to the tension and distrust of it. As a result, teachers may react in two different ways according to Hjelle (2001). They will either use coping skills to integrate something new into their familiar repertoire, or they will take action to either embrace it totally or challenge it outright. Hjelle further reveals that “some teachers accept change without believing in its value or adopting its spirit such that their behaviors may still be viewed as resistant, or at least, the most minimally compliant” (p. 28). Logically, the ideal is that teachers engage meaningfully.

Instructional leaders must make decisions that include implementing reforms and new practices, as well as other minor instructional decisions that require the participation of the

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

teachers, so understanding how teachers might perceive them is essential to their success.

Most of the studies that addressed teacher resistance were focused on a certain issue, such as grading policies, evaluation, and methodologies, or on resistance to reform, political issues, or state policies (Berkovich, 2011). Thus, resistance is generally pedagogical or organizational in nature (Hjelle, 2001). Only a small number of researchers investigated teacher resistance to administrative leadership on a broader scale, and I could not find any studies that addressed resistance to instructional leadership specifically. As stated by Hjelle (2001), the current literature on teacher resistance presents a narrow view of it and how it impacts the teaching profession. Thus, this study will add to the current knowledge base.

Many teachers have the reputation of being naturally and universally stubborn when facing change. Understanding teacher resistance gives us insight into why administrative efforts and decisions often fail (Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987). Hjelle (2001) denotes two working realities of a teacher's life, *collective action* and *isolation*, which contribute to resistance to change. *Collective action* refers to the phenomenon that teachers are grouped collectively into the staff, the faculty, the sixth grade team, etc. and take action or express their voice or opinions. *Isolation* refers to the fact that teachers work mostly alone, segregated in a classroom, for the entire day, and have very little, if any, contact and meaningful communication with other adults. Adding to the problem is the fact that because of this, "teachers are detached from the process of creating and instituting many of the changes that affect their jobs" (Hjelle, 2001, p. 20).

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

According to Knight (2009) in his article *What Can We Do About Teacher Resistance?* the educational community is too quick to blame teachers when educational reforms or new programs fail. He posited that instead of asking why teachers resist, we should ask what we can do to make it easier for teachers to implement new practices or embrace certain ideas. To this end, he posed six questions for consideration “that can bring to the surface reasons for this dissonance between teachers and change agents” (p. 1).

1. *Are the teaching practices powerful?* Teachers will not implement practices that they believe won't make a difference or result in student learning and achievement.
2. *Are the practices easy to implement?* Teachers are very concerned about time, and often resist new things that impose on their time.
3. *Are they experienced?* Teachers will usually resist persuasion, but will be more receptive to experiencing the new program or idea for themselves.
4. *Are teachers treated with respect?* Teachers tend to rebel against decisions or reforms that are forced on them or implemented without their contribution or blessing.
5. *Are teachers doing the thinking?* Teachers want to have their professional autonomy respected. They need to have input and choices.
6. *What has happened in the past?* Teachers will adopt the ‘this too shall pass’ mode of thinking if changes take place too fast with no support or focus (Knight, 2009). They also get stuck in the past, or how they've always done things, and can be reluctant to try

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

new things. Knight claims that these questions inherently include the answers to addressing resistance in teachers.

1. *Seek high-leverage teaching practices that are proven and powerful.* Those who propose new ways of teaching need to be certain that what they bring to teachers will have an unmistakable positive impact on students' and teachers' lives.
2. *Use data to select and monitor the impact of practices.* Data can be a valuable tool for the selection of effective teaching practices. Ignoring data can waste a great deal of effort on tools that don't address students', teachers', and schools' most pressing needs.
3. *Provide quality coaching.* Teachers rarely implement anything without sufficient support; precise explanations, modeling, and feedback.
4. *Balance precise explanations with provisional comments.* Professional developers can make it easier for teachers to learn new practices if they precisely describe how teachers should use new practices in the classroom. However, they should also explain those practices provisionally to allow teachers the freedom to adopt practices to fit their unique pedagogical approach or the particular needs of their students.
5. *Obtain commitment by offering teachers choices and valuing their voices.*  
The more teachers can have a say in how and what new practices they

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

implement, the more likely they will be to embrace new ways of teaching.

6. *Focus professional learning on a few critical teaching practices.* A better idea is to collaboratively identify a few critically important practices and then work together to ensure that they are implemented successfully.

7. *Align all activities related to professional learning.* Professional learning communities, coaching, teacher walkthroughs, program book studies, and all other forms of professional learning should focus on the same critically important practices that everyone agrees are important within the school.

8. *Increase relational trust.* Professional learning is most successful in settings that foster support and trust. (Knight, 2009, pp. 512 – 513)

Berkovich (2011) reiterates Knight's claims. Reforms "carry broad implications for teachers" (p. 563) and take a lot of effort, time, and planning, so when they are far-reaching, or poorly planned, implemented, and supported, "it is not surprising that they have often evoked resistance" (p. 563). He states further that teacher perceptions directly affect the success of any decision or reform by administrators. Hjelle (2001) also commented on this phenomenon when she stated that teachers who are resisting a change, reform, or decision may "be reacting to political and cultural influences of the workplace and the social order" (p. 1). She also claimed that teachers often feel that reforms and other administrative decisions have been 'done to them', and when they fail, due to lack of fidelity in

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

implementation or other problems, feel alienated and despair. Teachers “are quick to blame their superiors for the confusion, chaos, unpredictability, and even failure that may accompany shifts in practice (Hjelle, 2001, p. 3).

In her study of six teachers' implementation of a district and school mandated reading program, Hjelle (2001) described four themes of conflict between the administrators and the teachers that emerged and resulted in teacher negativity and resistance. They are “process-product approach to reform, ideas about teaching and learning, an expectation about the immediate acceptance of reform, and the notion of a bureaucratic model of school organization” (p. 84). Interestingly, teachers utilized their resistance in different ways.

Hjelle (2001) also observed and coined two types of resistance; *non-productive* and *productive action*. *Non-productive resistance* led the teachers to rush through the lessons. They followed the program and thus complied with the administrative directive, but did not do it with fidelity, so it neither impacted their own practice or students' achievement. *Productive action* manifested itself in compliance, but with the creative addition of activities and strategies to enrich and strengthen the program. Hjelle also added that the teachers who took productive action internalized the stress caused by their non-agreement of the program and sought ways to alleviate it, while the non-productive resisters externalized the stress, blamed the students, administrators, or other factors outside of themselves, and did not try to find solutions. Instead “their resistance acted as a means of creating the smoke screen that change did occur” (p. 167). The resistance the teachers showed had strong impacts on their

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

practice.

Corbett et. al. (1987) studied teacher resistance in three high schools and suggested that “Resistance depends upon the fit between a school’s culture and the proposed change” (p. 36). In other words, resistance occurs when the new practice, policy, or reform does not seem to fit with current beliefs about what school life is or should be, and there are varying degrees of allegiance to these beliefs. The researchers believed that culture, namely *sacred norms* and *profane norms* influence resistance. *Sacred norms* are those that are incontrovertible and form the professional identities of the staff. They become more powerful as more people adopt them and are widely accepted as the truth or ‘the way we do things here’. *Profane norms* are the exact opposite, they are susceptible to change. Corbett et. al. (1987) concluded that “It seems likely that change of any magnitude at all will touch norms deeply rooted in the school’s culture. Managing change requires more than artfully adjusting the process to minimize the barriers and maximize the incentives” (p. 56). Administrators must understand how the culture of the school impacts acceptance of any decision or reform and whether the culture needs altering as well. Then steps need to be taken to make modifications and improvements.

Zimmerman (2006) claimed that school leaders need to take into consideration *mental models*, which are “the maps that individuals and organizations follow to help them not only make sense of their context or world but also to interpret their reality” (p. 240). Some are positive and alleviate anxiety that is often caused by things that are new, but others are

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

negative and cause behaviors that are destructive. Most importantly, Zimmerman recommended that principals examine their own leadership styles and abilities, and after reflection make adjustments that foster engaging teachers in shared decision making, enhancing teachers' self-efficacy, and promoting professional learning and peer support. With regards to this phenomenon, Hunter-Heaston (2010) discovered that middle school teachers are more likely to buy in to instructional changes when they are involved in the processes. In addition, they state that there are other steps administrators can take to overcome teacher resistance; "creating a sense of urgency, developing and operationalizing a vision, rewarding constructive behaviors, aiming for short-term successes, and creating a professional learning community (p. 243).

### **Summary.**

Even though the number of studies that addressed teacher resistance to leadership was relatively small, there was a lot of information and insight to be gleaned from them. All of the studies reported that teacher resistance can be a problem in schools and impact student learning, so principals need to realize and comprehend this and find ways to engage and involve teachers in decision-making. "Understanding the conditions endured by teachers as they experience change should enlighten and inform policy makers" (Hjelle, 2001, p. 4) and school administrators. Hjelle (2001) promotes the notion that school leaders must understand the underlying reasons for teacher resistance and stop blaming teachers and viewing them as the enemy.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

This study seeks to fulfill this purpose; to give some insight to middle school administrators, who are dealing with specific and unique issues that elementary and high schools aren't, so they can observe teacher resistance as something that can be overcome and turned around. Rather than becoming frustrated by teacher resistance and viewing their teachers negatively and in a manner that restricts a positive school culture, administrators can feel empowered and hopeful because they have tools to utilize to respond. Hjelle (2001) suggested that when administrators understand the nature of resistance, it can be utilized "as motivation to encourage teachers to take part in the change process" (p. 36).

### **Middle School History and Theory**

#### **Junior high.**

Since the object of my study is to learn about the perceptions of middle school teachers, it was essential to learn about the back story of middle schools. In the late 1800s, beginning with The Committee of Ten appointed by the National Council of Education in 1892, scholars and other concerned citizens were beginning to realize that the elementary schools (grades 1- 8) and high schools (9 – 12) were not adequate for educating all students (Lounsbury, 1960; Lutz, 2004; Noar, 1957). As stated by Touton and Struthers (1926), people were dissatisfied with the attempt to teach a single curriculum to all students. Thus, the junior high school philosophy emerged. The report of The Committee of Ten in 1892 recommended that science, algebra, geometry, and foreign language should be taught to

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

students below grade nine (Noar, 1957). Various other committees made similar proposals over the next few years, which lead to the establishment of junior high schools that offered diverse courses to early adolescents and moved preadolescents out of the elementary schools (Noar, 1957).

The first junior high school opened in September of 1909 in Columbus, Ohio (Lounsbury, 1960; Noar, 1957), and by 1926 there were more than 1,100 (Noar, 1957). According to Touton and Struthers (1926), they were formed as a bridge to high school and to simultaneously increase graduation rates in high schools and decrease drop-outs. School needed to be more interesting so students would want to attend, and teachers needed to be able to find each student's strengths and interests in order to make their success more probable. Lounsbury (1960) recounted many other reasons for the uprising of junior highs; psychologists felt that specific institutions could serve the needs of early adolescents better, more citizenship education was needed due to the influx of immigrants into the country, and it was a solution for the school building shortage caused by World Wars I and II.

Basic descriptions of the junior high school began in the early 1900s. They were not always favorable or positive because the junior high school movement was still in its infancy and people were not sure it would be successful. Touton and Struthers (1926) stated that junior high schools guided "the pupil in an exploration of the fields of human thought, action, and endeavor, thereby to equip him with knowledge of his interests and capabilities" (p. 5) and acquainted "the pupil with an ever-broadening environment, thus enriching and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

socializing his life” (p. 6). Furthermore, junior highs should “provide opportunities for that type of leadership which in a democracy makes for profitable leisure hours as well as for a planned vocation” (p. 6).

A wide variety of courses were offered, meant to expose students to a broad amount of information about a lot of things rather than go deep into specific content. Junior highs provided departmental instruction with promotion by subject, homogenous grouping when appropriate, fostered student participation and feeling of belonging to the school group, and character education as well (Touton & Struthers, 1926). Gruhn and Douglass recounted that the junior highs sought to give students a well-rounded and exploratory learning experience in vocational and academic subjects and help them widen their interests in a variety of areas. They also tried to guide students to make sound emotional, social, as well as academic choices, and prepare them for high school and participation in general society.

However, things were not perfect, and this sentiment was expressed by many researchers and scholars at the time. Noar (1957) stated that “the junior high school movement continues to be fraught with controversy” (p. 470). Lounsbury (1960) recaps this sentiment when he wrote “the junior high school may not have been all that many hoped it would be” (p. 198). He went on to state that they did not prove themselves on many counts. They were a downward extension of the high schools at that time, the facilities were inadequate, there were no standards to follow, the teachers were not well-trained and lacked experience, and the junior high was just not as important as the high school (Lounsbury,

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

1998a). Tryon (1916) described many of them as being “nothing more than an administrative device which has been forced upon school authorities as a means of relieving congestion somewhere in their school systems” (p. 491). He noted that the changes that were supposed to have been made did not actually take place in a majority of the schools, such as with the content taught (especially in history), and with grading systems. Despite all of the negativity, for the next 60 years or so, the junior high philosophy boomed and developed, with middle schools opening up all over the country (Noar, 1957).

In the mid 1950s, the structure of the school day began to change into the multi-period day we see now, guidance counselors began to teach lessons on human relations and vocational issues, and clubs were added into the regular program (Noar, 1957). However, success was few and far between. Many of the practices that were called for were never really instituted or were in place poorly, and the notion that it all be done while keeping each individual child in mind was steadfast and admirable, however, in practice this rarely took place (Meyer, 2011). Meyer noted additionally that many junior highs had simply modified high school practices rather than truly meeting the needs of the individual students. As time went on and the 1950s came to a close, public outcry for reform began (Hunt, Wiseman, & Bowden, 2003).

As the junior high model entered the 1960s, it was evident that they were failing and that this could not be ignored anymore; it was thought that they grew much too quickly for the original philosophy to ever be realized (Touton & Struthers, 1926). The junior high

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

schools were trying to function in the same way as high schools, which totally ignored the developmental and learning needs of the students. The schedules and activities weren't actually modified, and most of the teachers were not trained to teach early adolescents. Finally, the junior high school licensure began; teachers could be certified to teach grades six through nine, but it was many years before college programs prepared teachers well-enough and an adequate number of teachers had this certification (Toney, 2012). As a result, "the dream of a bridge to high school was never achieved as many unsuccessful students dropped out of school" (Toney, 2012, p. 45).

William Alexander is generally credited with spearheading this protest and with coining the core idea of the middle school in a speech he gave in 1963 at a conference for school administrators (Meyer, 2011). He called for the middle school to be an institution of its own, meaning that it would no longer serve as the bridge to high school. Furthermore, he specified that there should be more curricular specialization, more effective teacher training programs that prepared teachers to teach middle school students specifically, and clearly defined practices that meet student needs (Alexander, 1965).

### **Middle school.**

Resulting from Alexander's pivotal speech, important changes were made in the junior high model. Many scholars continued Alexander's calls for reform. The book *Education in the Junior High School Years* by James Conant addressed several changes that needed to take place in the junior high schools; math instruction that focused on

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

“mathematical concepts rather than arithmetical calculations” (Toney, 2012, p. 45), science that focused on exploration and inquiry rather than on historical fact finding, and returning ninth grade to the high school (Hunt et. al., 1998). Thus, the middle school was born. According to the New York State Education Department (NYSED), the middle school concept was created “to revolutionize - and humanize - life in the classroom” (NYSED, 2001b). Donald Eichorn proposed that middle schools should be totally restructured to include grades six, seven, and eight and take into account the “physical, social, emotional, and intellectual factors that are in flux during early adolescence” (Toney, 2012, p. 46).

As the end of the 1960s approached, the educational tide ebbed from the emphasis on math and science that came with Sputnik to the psychology and sociology driven child-centered values of the 1970s (Meyer, 2011) and to middle schools. One of these, which as time went on proved to be controversial and questionable, was the movement of the sixth grade from the elementary to the middle school. This was done partially to meet the needs to early adolescents, but also to alleviate crowding in the elementary schools (Cook et. al., 2006). It has proven mildly successful in certain districts, but there are many people who claim that there are more discipline problems with the sixth graders in middle school than in elementary school because the sixth graders emulate the bad behavior and choices of their older peers in seventh and eighth grade (Cook, MacCoun, Mushkin, & Vigdor, 2006).

The National Middle School Association created in 1973, which provides

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

information, resources, and guidance for those interested in early adolescent education, oversaw the creation of a report called *This We Believe* in 1982 (which has been updated many times, most recently in 2010) which detailed the middle school philosophy. This important educational work, originally co-authored in part by Donald Eichorn and William Alexander and created to reform the concept of the junior high, included the following tenets; middle schools students should have an advisor or trusted adult to advocate and bond with, the academic structure should be flexible and set up to meet students' diverse emotional and learning needs, teachers need to be dedicated to teaching early adolescents and working collaboratively, and the curriculum should be investigative and integrated. Later versions addressed parent involvement, cultural diversity issues, special education, implications of rural settings, corporal punishment/student discipline, and student services programs. The association also recognized the need for research on middle schools (National Middle School Association, 2010).

The middle school philosophy was designed to take into account the distinctive development characteristics of early adolescents (Lutz, 2004). Unique to the K – 12 setting is the degree of collaboration in middle schools. Even though teachers in the other two levels spend more time collaborating now than ever before due to the creation of initiatives such as Professional Learning Teams by Rick and Becky DuFour and utilizing data to inform instruction, more collaboration naturally occurs in middle schools. This is due to the fact that in North Carolina, and across the nation, most middle schools are set up in teams. For

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

example, one social studies, math, science, and English Language Arts teacher are grouped together to form a team. They teach the same students who rotate amongst their classrooms.

Through the 1980s and 1990s the middle school philosophy was firmly grounded, but even so, many middle schools were still not functioning as they should. Agencies and scholars, keenly aware of this, continued to give recommendations for how middle schools should operate. The 1985 report of the National Association of Secondary School Principals Council on Middle Level Education, *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, articulated more requirements for an effective middle school. The authors suggested that middle schools should have a guiding set of values, a curriculum that is balanced, organizational structures that focus on instruction and learning, strong leaders/administrators, and outreach programs that connect the schools to the community (Arth et. al., 1985). By the end of the 1980s, middle schools were becoming known as holding tanks, where students were basically kept safe until it was time to go to high school (Meyer, 2011).

In 1989, the landmark document *Turning Points: Preparing America's Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* was published by the Carnegie Foundation. It claimed that middle schools were the best places to re-engage students who were failing and at risk for dropping out in high school. Thus, it called for the middle schools to rededicate themselves to the middle school philosophy; many were not and the students were getting lost in the shuffle. Although the document restated many of the ideals that had been expressed in earlier research, some new points came out. *Turning Points* called for the empowerment of teachers and administrators

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

to make sound decisions, a dedication to enhancing student growth and learning through health and physical fitness, and the creation of small learning communities within the school (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1985).

In 1995, a follow-up to *Turning Points* was published, and then in 2000 an updated study was conducted called the *Middle Grades School State Policy Initiative*. It was written to assess the current state of middle schools to see if the previous recommendations had been put into practice and what the effects were, and to present new recommendations for moving forward. It went deeper than the first document and provided guidance “on how to implement the original recommendations” (Toney, 2012, p. 56). Other studies, such as the Third International Science and Mathematics Study (TIMSS) in 1995, found that elementary students often performed better than students who had completed middle school. Eighth graders were ranked 18<sup>th</sup> among 26 countries based on test scores, while fourth graders ranked 12<sup>th</sup> (Meyer, 2011). In the 2003 study, eighth graders were ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in science out of 45 nations while fourth graders ranked 6<sup>th</sup> out of 25 countries in science. Similar data was realized in the 2007 study as well (National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/timss/>).

*Turning Points 2000* speculated that many middle schools were failing and not educating America’s young adolescents well because philosophies and practices were not being implemented with fidelity or were put in place in isolation. The authors stated that in order to be effective, all of the recommendations from the original *Turning Points* must be in

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

place and work harmoniously together (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 2000). No Child Left Behind legislation only added fuel to the fire. It mandated accountability through summative testing, so schools had to make changes in order to avoid sanctions. Some of the changes were provided for through the legislation; emphasizing improving reading skills, including students in special programs in the testing (such as students with disabilities and in English as a Second Language programs), increasing technology use, and ensuring the safety of the school. Others were not, but the mandate was the same; increase students' academic performance or there will be consequences. However, even when changes were made, they were not usually effective (Adams, 2007; Williams, 2005).

Recently, numerous studies have shown that middle schools are still not doing a great job of educating their students (Adams, 2007; Manzo, 2000; Williams, 2005), and national test scores for eighth grade support those conclusions. Clark et. al. (2006) cited a study by Bedard and Do (2005) which concluded that districts with a grade six through eight configuration experience "a 1 – 3 percent decline on on-time graduation rates" (p. 12). According to 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results in math, 27% of students performed below Basic level, which is the same as in 2009. There was no increase in the percent of students at Basic either, 73% for both years. In reading, of the 76% percent of students at or above Basic, only 34% are at or above Proficient, which is well below half. Twenty-four percent of students were below Basic level, which is only a one

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

percent change from 2009 and a two percent change from 2007. Just 3% of students achieved at the Advanced level in writing, with 80% at or above the Basic level and 20% below. This data is definitely concerning.

In addition, there was a huge gap in the performance between males and females; the average scale score for females was 160 but just 140 for males. Merely 3% of students performed at or above the Advanced level in science, which is a drop from 7% in 2009. Only 32% of students were at or above the Proficient level, with most of the students, 65%, performing at the Basic level (The Nation's Report Card, [nationsreportcard.gov](http://nationsreportcard.gov)).

NAEP trend data also demonstrates the lack of progress of middle school students compared to elementary students. In math between 1978 and 2008, fourth graders increased their average scale scores by 24 points, but eighth graders only improved by 17 points. The same trend can be seen in reading; fourth graders improved by 10 points but eighth graders improved by only four points (Meyer, 2011). "Middle schools seem to be dampening the modest improvements being made by our primary schools" (Meyer, 2011, p. 43).

### **Middle school reform.**

Soon after the middle school concept took hold of our nation's schools for young adolescents, improvement efforts began. Three of the most researched reforms will be discussed here. First, there has been a movement to integrate the middle school grades back into the elementary school which William Alexander advocated for this in his 1963 address. "The number of 'elemiddle' schools, the new term for K – 8 schools, has jumped from

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

4,000 nationwide to just under 7,000 in the last four years” (Meyer, 2011). This concept was attractive to school districts because it put middle school students back in the more nurturing environment of the elementary school and could extend services to them that might not have been in place in a separate middle school. Meyer (2011) suggested that in K – 8 schools, there is less student violence, attendance is better, and the academics are just as strong, if not stronger. A study completed in 2006 by Cook, MacCoun, Mushkin, and Vigdor found that sixth graders enrolled in a middle school are twice as likely to be disciplined for behavior problems as those who are in an elementary school, and that this finding remains the same even when the data is adjusted for socioeconomic and demographic factors. “Furthermore, the higher infraction rates recorded by sixth graders who are placed in middle school persist at least through ninth grade” (p. 1).

A likely explanation for this is that sixth graders are cognitively impressionable and highly influenced by the behaviors of their older peers in seventh and eighth grades. In general, they are not yet capable of handling the freedom given to seventh and eighth graders in a middle school. Also, middle schools place more emphasis on academic progress and discipline than they do relationships with teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000), which is different from elementary school and something sixth graders are just not emotionally ready for. William Alexander advocated for this set up because it gives the middle school a status of its own, allows for teaming in grades five and six without moving too far away from the elementary model that the students are used to, and it paves the way

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

for more specified teacher training (Alexander, 1965). Studies have not yet shown conclusively whether it is successful or not.

Another middle school reform that has been employed to help ensure student success is reorganizing the structural elements. This reform has been implemented in many ways, such as organizing teacher teams in core academic areas, structuring the schedule so teachers have common planning time, implementing some form of block scheduling, grouping students heterogeneously rather than by performance and ability (especially in English Language Arts and math), and creating houses or schools within schools (NYSED, 2001a). This reform has garnered mixed results from district to district and school to school. The specific strategies that schools put into place to restructure and reorganize are often not implemented with fidelity, are often started along with other reforms so it is difficult to really focus on and give the required time to any one, and limited training and follow-through cause teachers to give up and lose interest (NYSED, 2001a).

Not surprisingly, the last important middle school reform I will recap is aligning instruction and instructional practices with the state and/or district curriculum and learning standards. Given the development of the National Common Core Standards, this trend will not end anytime soon. As with the other two school improvement strategies, its impact on student learning and performance had not been proven yet. According to the NYSED (2001a), part of the reason for this is that “there are no common expectations of the content knowledge and skills needed by all students to be ready for high school work” (p. 12). In

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

other words, different teams of teachers can have varying focuses and a majority of the lessons taught to students are a review from previous years. In addition, there is an unfortunate belief that some students cannot learn and thus should not have access to the same content and rigor as other students who are more capable (NYSED, 2001a).

### **Middle school students.**

In order to more fully understand middle schools, it is important to learn about the students who attend them. "Adolescence is a period of storm and stress" and the children going through it are trying to establish a sense of identity (Roberts Brailsford, 2001, p. 3). Early adolescents are experiencing grand and often misunderstood changes in their body and body chemistry, especially sexually, due to puberty. They are growing rapidly and as a result often exhibit conflicting and rapidly changing behaviors. They can be highly active but are easily fatigued, are often critical of themselves but outwardly display over-confidence and a frequent pre-occupation with self, and can be sensitive to the comments of others while displaying rudeness and callousness themselves. Early adolescents are also constantly seeking peer approval, and friendships are extremely, if not overly, important to them (Lutz, 2004). This makes them highly susceptible to the influence of others (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Caskey & Anfara Jr., 2007; <http://www.etsd.org/ems/endorsement/characteristics.htm>).

Educationally, middle school students seek values in simple and concrete forms, demand and expect fair treatment from teachers and other adults, are inquisitive and want to

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

explore things, and need to be actively involved. They are in a transition period in terms of thinking abstractly, prefer activities that allow them to interact with peers rather than work individually, and enjoy opportunities to engage in real-life learning activities. Students at this age seek approval and can be easily discouraged, closely observe and challenge adults, and may show disinterest in academic subjects while still being curious about the world around them (Caskey & Anfara Jr., 2007; <http://www.etsd.org/ems/endorsement/characteristics.htm>).

The NYSMSA created a policy for middle schools in 1989 after conducting extensive research on young adolescents aged 10 to 14 at the insistence of the New York State Board of Regents. The policy, called the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and Schools with Middle-Level Grades*, contains a section on the characteristics of early adolescents. The policy states the following about “the changes emerging adolescents experience and the resulting behaviors” (NYSEDb, p. 1). They include:

1. accelerated physical growth marked by the development of secondary sex characteristics, hormonal changes, and increases in height, weight, and muscular strength.
2. increased importance of peers and the peer group.
3. the need for repeated affirmation and heightened sensitivity to comments about personal traits.
4. the desire and requirement for direction and discipline as well as for

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

autonomy and independence, exemplified by testing the limits of what acceptable behaviors are.

5. array of intellectual skills and abilities ranging from concrete to more abstract.
6. preference for hands-on classroom activities rather than passive activities.
7. inconsistency in actions and general behavior.
8. desire to try new things, explore surroundings, and learn new things.

(NYSED, 2001b)

The policy further explains that these changes are natural occurrences that young adolescents usually cannot predict and don't understand. In addition,

Contemporary societal views and expectations of adolescents, the pressures and demands [*sic*] society on youngsters aged 10 – 14, and the range of changes within society (including technological change and increasing cultural diversity) with which youngsters must cope may also affect the ease or difficulty with which these students deal with changes associated with the transformation from child to adolescent. These societal factors, while they influence all students in varying degrees, may have an especially profound effect upon those youngsters about to enter adolescence. They have the potential for compounding the ease or difficulty with which youngsters make the transition from childhood to adolescence (NYSED, 2001b, p. 1).

The characteristics of students in middle school certainly make it harder to educate them and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

manage middle schools the way they should be managed. However, according to NYSED (2001b), there are many positive characteristics of preadolescents that are overlooked and not capitalized on in school, such as their curiosity and desire for hands-on activities. Hopefully strong middle school teachers and instructional leaders can change this trend in the years to come by utilizing research and best practices.

### **Middle school teachers.**

Integral to this study are the participants, middle school teachers. As stated by Toney (2012), “middle school teachers are unique in the field of education” (p. 2). The majority of the existing research explored the characteristics of effective middle school teachers or what characteristics middle school teachers need in order to be effective. There weren't any studies that gave a general description of a middle school teacher in the middle school setting. However, studies utilizing middle school teachers as the participants described their actions, such as planning and grading, and thus could be used to determine some general characteristics for this study to assist with the interpretation of the data.

One such study, conducted by Meyer and VanHoose (1981), stated that middle school teachers do not perceive their principals as “fulfilling the characteristics of effective leadership” (p. 72). They also noted that middle school teachers expect a high frequency of communication from the principal to the staff, parents, and community, and need principals to be responsive to their needs and questions. Williamson and Johnston (2000) conducted a study on middle school teachers and concluded that as a whole, they have defined and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

inflexible thoughts about how middle schools should be run, how they should teach, and what administrators should do. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) implied that trust between a teacher and principal is much more important to middle school teachers than to teachers in other levels.

An intriguing study done by Radcliffe and Mandeville (2007) sought to find out why certain teachers are attracted to teaching early adolescents (grades 6 – 8). They determined that these teachers want to teach middle grades because they believe that the students are relatively mature, can form positive relationships with them, and are ready to learn the complex material they are expected to teach. Their research also discovered that middle school teachers feel like they are able to relate to and influence the students, and that the students “are able to talk and discuss ideas” (p. 264). They appreciate the ability of young adolescents to think at a higher level and to work more independently, and are attracted to the content-driven curriculum. Another study echoed the finding of the previous study; middle school teachers believe they can form positive relationships with the students. Shann (1998) further stated that middle school teachers “are more satisfied with this aspect of the job than any other” (p. 72).

In a case study of 12 middle school teachers, Brown (1988) determined that the middle school teachers' planning habits were very different from those of elementary teachers. The 12 teachers in her study did not engage in term planning; they planned by units in weekly or daily chunks, and focused more on activities or individual lessons than on

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

objectives or skills to be taught. They utilized the previous year's plans and "made planning decisions on the basis of what had worked for them in the past, the school schedule, and the availability of instructional materials" (p. 69) as well as curriculum guides, the textbook, competency requirements, and student ability and interest. They did not develop new units, favoring those that they had already taught and were familiar with, and seemed to give little attention to interdisciplinary instruction.

Brown (1988) further noted that "these findings reinforce the idea that teachers operate as curriculum implementers and not curriculum planners as they consider objectives already written in curriculum guides and competencies" (p. 79). Interestingly, Brown's discussion section stated repeatedly that there were inconsistencies between the teachers' answers on the questionnaire, what they said in the interviews, and what was observed through document examination. For example, the teachers indicated that student learning influenced unit planning very often and the teacher's manual rarely influenced unit planning, but the interviews and observations indicated the exact opposite. In other words, their actions did not match their communicated beliefs.

In a study about the differences in grading habits between elementary and middle school teachers conducted by Randall and Engelhard (2010), it was discovered that the middle school teachers graded more severely than the elementary teachers; they assigned lower grades overall and gave more failing grades. The middle school teachers also awarded lower grades to students with disabilities or students who had low achievement. The

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

researchers theorized that the reason for the strict grading practices of middle school teachers has something to do with the pressures to prepare the students for high school, which elementary teachers don't feel.

### **Middle schools in North Carolina.**

In North Carolina, middle schools are governed by the NCDPI as legislated by the North Carolina General Assembly, and house grades six through eight. The state is responsible for a majority of the funding for the schools as well as for the oversight of the academic curriculum, and each county is responsible for the implementation of the curriculum and overseeing all programs. There are some core structures and beliefs that guide the middle schools in each district.

1. Districts shall administer the state assessments in language arts and math, as well as science to eight graders.
2. All teachers shall hold the appropriate certification to teach their assigned subject(s).
3. Districts shall ensure that the Common Core Standards and state curriculum are taught in each grade level and subject.
4. Districts shall provide additional services for students not meeting benchmarks or passing state assessments.
5. Students shall receive instruction in all of the State learning standards, with instruction in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and healthful living occurring each year in each of the middle grades.
6. Students shall be provided opportunities for taking high school courses on an accelerated basis. (Wake County Public Schools Planning Guide, <http://www.wcpss.net/what-we-teach/curriculum/pdfs/mspg-1-22-2013.pdf>)

In the district in which I am conducting this study, National Career Development competencies, developed by the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee, are used to guide instruction and prepare students for high school courses.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **SELF-KNOWLEDGE**

Competency 1: Knowledge of the influence of a positive self-concept

Competency 2: Skills to interact with others

Competency 3: Knowledge of the importance of growth and change

### **EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL PLANNING**

Competency 4: Knowledge of the benefits of educational achievement to career opportunities

Competency 5: Understanding the relationship between work and learning

Competency 6: Skills to locate, understand and use career information

Competency 7: Knowledge of skills necessary to seek and obtain jobs

### **CAREER PLANNING**

Competency 8: Understanding how work relates to the needs and functions of the economy and society

Competency 9: Skills to make decisions

Competency 10: Knowledge of the interrelationships of life roles

Competency 11: Knowledge of different occupations and changing male/female roles

Competency 12: Understanding the process of career planning

(<http://www.wcpss.net/what-we-teach/curriculum/pdfs/mspg-1-22-2013.pdf>)

Regarding state assessment results on the eighth grade 2011 NAEP, North Carolina's students are performing relatively well compared to students in other states and the nation as a whole, and are for the most part showing steady improvement. On the reading test in 2011, eighth graders had an average scale score of 263, which is three scale points higher than in 2009. However, it is one scale point lower than the national average. In math, the average scale score rose slightly from 284 in 2009 to 286 in 2011. This score is also three scale points higher than the national average of 283. In 2009, the state performed better than the national average and slightly higher in 2011. In science, average scale scores rose four scale points from 144 to 148, but the 2011 scores, when compared to the national average, are three scale points lower (The Nation's Report Card, [nationsreportcard.gov](http://nationsreportcard.gov)). The state is

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

continuing to focus on teaching and learning as well as helping students to become globally competitive and fluent in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (<http://stateboard.ncpublicschools.gov/>).

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter Two summarized the research related to my study. Studies that investigated the topic of instructional leadership in a new light were reviewed, as well as studies that were conducted in middle schools and involved assistant principals. Perception theory and teacher resistance were described and investigated to provide some grounded theories which enlighten this study. Finally, middle school theory was examined to lend some context to the study and give insight into the subjects and their environment. The literature clearly suggests that there are major gaps in our knowledge of the reasons that instructional leadership is often viewed by teachers in a negative light, and paves the way for new and more in depth studies to fill in these gaps. This study will hopefully be a part of that process.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

My overarching objectives for conducting this study are to better understand instructional leadership through the perceptions teachers possess about it and why they have those perceptions. The purpose section, literature review, and overview of the methodological approach in Chapters One and Two have laid the foundation for this chapter and the continuation of this research. Thus, in Chapter Three, the decision to use the qualitative approach will be thoroughly described and explained. These processes will allow me to make deep and meaningful connections with the data, and provide middle school administrators with information regarding teachers' perceptions that they can use to support change efforts within their schools. I also hope to give middle school teachers an in depth look into what instructional leadership truly is and what actions define it so they can reflect on their own attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. Changes must be made by administrators and teachers in order for instructional leadership behaviors to impact students.

This study was conducted through surveys and interviews of middle school teachers. This chapter describes in detail the research design and questions, site selection and sampling criteria, data collection and analysis, validity and reliability safeguards, ethical issues, and study limitations.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Research Design**

It is important to me to be able to contribute knowledge to the educational community at large through this study. This is why I have chosen the qualitative method of study. “Qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic” (Patton, 2002, p. 55). It will allow me to conduct interviews and surveys in order to be able to make broad conclusions and bring out larger themes. In addition, I want my data to reflect the everyday thoughts and actions of the participants instead of a manufactured once in a lifetime snapshot on a designated day and time.

Qualitative research will allow me to be highly descriptive. As stated by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), most of the data is in the form of words rather than numbers, which allows it to reflect the exact statements of participants and thus be accurate and all-encompassing. Thick description of what my participants say will be prevalent in my study. “The qualitative research approach demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). In this research this is really important because many actions and beliefs about instructional leadership might be revealed that teachers may take for granted but are absolutely essential to meaningful and lasting change and growth processes.

For me, the practice of instructional leadership is as important as the outcomes it can produce. This is what made qualitative research perfect for my study because there is a great

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

deal of attention given to the comprehensive understanding of a topic. As stated by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), conclusions are developed from the “bottom up (rather than from the top down), from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected. The theory is grounded in the data” (p. 6). They equate it to putting together a picture “that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts” (p. 6). My inferences and assumptions will be realized after I am finished with my data collection and interviewed some of my participants. I have not assumed anything about what I will find at this point.

The most important reason that I am utilizing qualitative methods is because I am searching for meaning. “The qualitative research tradition produces an interpretation of reality that is useful in understanding the human condition” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 27). I am essentially trying to find out how teachers make sense of instructional leadership and react to it in the real world; to see instructional leadership from their point of view. The perspectives of my participants are of key importance and will serve as the foundation and basis of all of my findings and conclusions. Patton (2002) stated the strength of qualitative methods for this purpose; “Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increases the depth of understanding...” (p. 14).

Within qualitative research methods there are many theoretical perspectives or paradigms. My research is not grounded in any one theory or paradigm, there are several that fit. From Phenomenology I am taking the “attempt to understand the meaning of events and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25). I am seeking to comprehend how teachers internally construct the meaning of instructional leadership and how that drives their interactions and relationships with their administrators in a school. Phenomenologists subscribe to the belief that “multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others, and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 26). This interpretation is also pervasive in the Symbolic Interaction theoretical perspective, which stresses that “we must understand definitions and the processes by which they are manufactured” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 27). In my research, I am seeking to understand the perspectives of teachers from their point of view and from within their reality.

Another perspective within qualitative research that is prevalent in my study is the acknowledgement of culture. There is a well defined culture, or sense of what is acceptable and what is not, in a middle school, which determines how the people who work there act and react to each other and situations. There is also a separate culture, comprised of unambiguous and particular norms, for teachers and for administrators, which often clashes. Teachers are the leaders in their classrooms and administrators are the leaders in the school (Petzko, 2002). Consequently, there is a definite insider mentality within both of these groups which often prevents members from understanding each other. For this study, the insider mentality of teachers will be most prevalent. Through this perspective, I seek to understand what aspects of the teaching culture administrators need to better understand in

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

order to realize the necessary changes in their schools.

### **Research Questions**

There are two distinct, but still very closely related, research questions which are guiding and driving this study.

1. What perceptions of instructional leadership do middle school teachers possess?
2. Why do some middle school teachers have negative perceptions of their administrators as instructional leaders?

### **Site Selection and Sampling Criteria**

I chose middle schools in the largest urban school district in North Carolina, 16<sup>th</sup> largest in the United States, as my site. The district has a total of 169 schools which include two leadership academies, 16 Global Network schools, 28 STEM schools, and several Renaissance and Career Academies, serves a total of about 153,000 students, and has consistent student growth of an average of 2% each year since 2009/2010. About 50,500 students qualify for free or reduced lunch, about 19,000 qualify for special education, roughly 16,000 are classified as Limited English Proficiency and/or qualify for English as a Second Language services, and approximately 27,000 qualify for Academically and Intellectually Gifted services. The district has 50 Year Round Schools and 31 magnet schools.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Since I am a former employee of the district, I felt this was a good choice because the district utilizes and appreciates data and I believe that this study could be of use to the middle school principals and some central office personnel there. The district serves about 35,000 students in 33 regular middle schools and three special or optional middle schools. Ten of the middle schools are Year Round Schools, six are STEM schools, three are Global Network schools, and eight are magnet schools. The students and teachers are very diverse, representing many different ethnic and economic backgrounds, and represent all areas of the county. There are about 1,800 middle school teachers in the district. Teachers are “information-rich cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 242) and provided me with a great wealth of important information and allowed me to perform an in-depth study.

After gaining approval from the district to conduct my study, which involved filling out a detailed application and including the IRB approval, I sent my informational letter (Appendix A) to 1,788 middle school teachers from the 36 schools in the county with the Informed Consent Form, IRB approval letter, and the district approval letter. Only teachers who have regular interaction with students were contacted; the district employs lead teachers, instructional resource teachers, and consultant teachers who work strictly or mostly with the teachers rather than the students. However, 75 of the email addresses were invalid, so 1,713 surveys were actually sent. I utilized the middle schools' websites to get access to the teachers' email addresses. Patton (2002) wrote that “sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources” (p. 244). For this study, I wanted to know what teachers’ perceptions are of instructional leadership, so beginning with as large a sample as possible afforded me with a better chance to understand these perceptions, increased the chance of diversity regarding teacher demographic variables, and made it possible for me to have enough teachers to interview.

The choice to use middle school teachers as my participants is fundamentally based on my experiences as a middle school assistant principal. The middle school teachers I worked with generally believed that the administrators are there mostly to support them with discipline and suspend and or punish students when they have problems with them. They also did not want to get instructional ideas or suggestions from me or the other administrators in the school because they felt that teaching was their territory. Many of them also believed that all students must and should be able to learn the information as they present it the first time. Utilizing instructional methods other than ‘stand and deliver’, modifying the curriculum, and acknowledging that many students enter into middle school without having the prerequisite skills to be successful were not strategies or actions most of them knew how to do or were comfortable attempting. This often caused them to have negative perceptions of instructional leadership actions and thus resistant to certain reforms, instructional strategies, and decisions that administrators make (Knight, 2009).

As the researcher, my most recent experience as an educator and administrator has been in a middle school so I am interested in learning more about them as a system and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

organization. In addition, I experienced a great deal of skepticism from the middle school teachers when I tried to support them instructionally because most of my 21 years of teaching experience had been at the elementary school level. I was not recognized as someone who understood or had knowledge of middle school curriculum and instructional techniques or how middle schools function. Two relatively recent studies supported my experiences and concluded that traditionally, middle school teachers are more autonomous than elementary teachers and hold a deep rooted belief that they are experts as teachers and in their subject (Hunter-Heaston, 2010; Manning, 2000). This was both confusing and frustrating to me, which spurred the desire to investigate middle school culture in detail.

An online survey (Appendix B) with two parts was used to determine the teachers' perceptions about instructional leadership. Part 1 included eight yes or no questions (and space to add written comments was provided) as well as 10 demographic data inquiries. This part of the survey was also used as a screening process for the interview. Part 2, adapted from a survey used by Hallinger and Murphy in their 1985 study *Assessing the Instructional Management Behavior of Principals*, contained 56 statements relevant to instructional leadership and asked the teachers to rate them according to the extent each was demonstrated by their principal.

The Part 1 surveys of the teachers who indicated that they were willing to be interviewed were tallied and scored in order to find out which of them listed the most 'no' answers. The 'no' answers indicated some negative perceptions of instructional leadership.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Those teachers who had 'no' answers on the entire survey, 'no' answers to at least two of the first three questions and 'no' to at least one other question in numbers 4 – 8, 'no' to at least one of the first three questions and 'no' to two or more of the questions in numbers 4 – 8, or at least three 'no' answers for questions 4 - 8 were eligible to be interviewed. Thus, if teachers answered questions 1 – 3 with 'yes' but had a majority of 'no' answers for questions 4 – 8 they were also included in the interview pool.

There were 21 Part 1 surveys that qualified the teacher to be interviewed. Criterion Sampling was used to create a sample of teachers who met a certain criteria; they have negative perceptions of instructional leadership and answered 'no' to a predetermined number of questions. Random sampling, where the surveys of the teachers who showed negative perceptions of instructional leadership would be placed in a pile face down and then ten drawn to select the teachers who would be contacted for an interview, would have been utilized if there had been a larger number of teachers willing to be interviewed. Four teachers agreed to participate in the interview, so all four of them were contacted in order to gain as much interview data as possible.

### **Data Collection**

Following the qualitative approach, surveys and interviews were utilized to collect the data. Each of these data types allowed me to gauge the educators' beliefs, philosophies, and opinions in different ways to make unambiguous conclusions. As stated by Bogdan and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Biklen (2007), “many sources of data [are] better in a study than a single source because multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena you [are] studying” (p. 115). Patton (2002) expresses this sentiment also when he stated that “the themes, patterns, understandings, and insights” that come from using multiple forms of data “are the fruit of qualitative inquiry” (p. 5).

### **Surveys.**

Due to time constraints and the belief that most of the teachers who are interested in participating in the study would do so within a few days of receiving either my first email or the follow-up, I kept the survey links open for two weeks so I had enough time to gather and analyze the data, write Chapters Four and Five, and submit my paper at least two weeks before the defense date. My first email to all prospective participants included my introductory letter (Appendix A), the Informed Consent Form, my IRB approval letter, the approval letter from the county, and the survey links. Then I sent a reminder email which included the same documents a week later. The surveys were given via eSurveyspro.com.com, an anonymous and confidential free survey website. It was chosen due to the flexibility it provided concerning the number of questions that could be asked in a survey and because it ensures survey-taker anonymity.

The surveys were conducted online to make them easier and more attractive to complete in several respects. I believed that most people would consider typing to be much simpler and faster than writing with a pen or pencil, and with the frequent use of email and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

digital forms, programs, and processes in our country, has become a main way of communication for most educators. All of the teachers who participated in this study had access to a computer at work and/or at home. The surveys included only questions that were essential and highly relevant to my study and could be finished in about an hour but no more than 90 minutes so the participants did not feel like they were wasting their valuable time. Teachers highly value their personal and planning time, so I knew I would have a greater chance of getting more responses if I respected that.

Part 1 of the survey included eight questions which I created and required only a 'yes' or 'no' answer (although space was provided for comments), along with 10 questions that asked for demographic data such as number of years teaching, age range, National Board Certification status, number of certifications, ethnicity, leadership roles, and number of years at current school. The questions were targeted at assessing the participants' perspectives about administrators as instructional leaders. There was also a question that asked for participation in the interview and one question at the end that gave the subjects the opportunity to add any additional or summarizing information they felt was important.

Part 2 included 56 Likert Scale questions, divided into eleven subcategories, which were adapted from the PIMRS developed and used by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). This survey instrument has been used in over 100 studies (Chappelear & Price, 2012) and is widely considered a valid, reliable, and true measure of how administrators perform as instructional leaders (Dennis, 2009).

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Permission was obtained to utilize the PIMRS and to modify it to meet my needs. Just like Hallinger and Murphy, my respondents used a five point Likert Scale to indicate the extent to which they felt the principal executed each particular practice. Unlike the original scale, however, the ratings used were '*almost never*', '*seldom*', '*sometimes*', '*frequently*', and '*almost always*', and the option to choose '?' or '*not applicable*' was changed to 'prefer not to answer'. Also, the statements which were used were either kept the same as the original survey or were changed slightly, and 15 of the questions from the PIMRS were not utilized because they did not support the goals of this study. The questions in my study targeted eleven areas of instructional leadership as identified by Hallinger and Murphy (1985).

- Questions 1 – 5 assessed *framing the school goals*.
- Questions 6 – 10 assessed *communicating the school goals*.
- Questions 11 – 17 assessed *supervising and evaluating instruction*.
- Questions 18 – 22 assessed *coordinating the curriculum*.
- Questions 23 – 28 assessed *monitoring student progress*.
- Questions 29 – 32 assessed *protecting instructional time*.
- Questions 33 – 37 assessed *maintaining high visibility*.
- Questions 38 – 40 assessed *providing incentives for teachers*.
- Questions 41 – 48 assessed *promoting professional development*.
- Questions 49 – 52 assessed *developing and enforcing academic standards*.
- Questions 53 – 56 assessed *providing incentives for learning*.

However, these categories were not listed on the survey as they were in Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) study. I did not want the categories to influence the participants' answers. For example, if a respondent believes that their principal is normally not visible in the school, knowing which specific questions targeted that area might influence them to answer those questions with the same answer choice or with a more negative answer choice than they

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

would if each question was considered separately.

The PIMRS was chosen not only because it assessed instructional behaviors well, but also because it was a Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS). The items are “behaviorally anchored in the sense that they are statements of critical job-related behaviors” (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 225). A BARS rating scale makes the expectations of what must be observed in the employee’s on-the-job behavior very explicit. After all of the completed surveys were collected and printed, I assigned them a number in consecutive order beginning with one. This number was used to reference the participants’ comments in chapters four and five as well as on any data charts.

### **Interviews.**

One of the main methods of obtaining qualitative data is through interviews, which give a researcher a lot of authentic information about a subject that cannot be collected by other means and allow rich and deep conclusions and connections to be made (Patton, 2002). Patton also declared that “interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (p. 4). Furthermore, interviews utilize open-ended questions to allow for a large amount of data to be collected (Manders, 2008). With the interviews, my goal was to probe deeper into the topics assessed in the surveys through stories, opinions, and anecdotes.

I employed 13 original questions (Appendix C) created specifically for this study to make certain that I was eliciting all of the information necessary. The questions delved

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

deeper into the teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership and why these perceptions exist. I also allowed for spontaneous questions as well as piggyback questions to elicit more details or request information that was important but not addressed in my original questions. Interviewees were emailed a copy of the questions before the interview took place so they knew in advance what would be asked and could refer to the questions during the interview if necessary. The interviews took place at their convenience by phone given the fact that as researcher, I live in New York State.

The teachers understood that they were being recorded for transcription purposes only and gave permission for this to take place by accepting the terms outlined in the Informed Consent Form. The interviews were recorded via a digital recording app called Voice Record on my iPad 4 from the speaker on my iPhone 4. Confidentiality was insured by using a pseudonym for each participant when addressing their answers in Chapter Four (Richards, 2010) and by destruction of the permission forms and recordings after the completion of the study. The pseudonyms were chosen from a list of names I compiled once I knew the interviewees' names so the possibility of using a real name was eliminated.

### **Data Analysis**

This study entailed the analysis of surveys and interviews. As the data was analyzed, I recorded my thoughts, opinions, and ideas about the information on Microsoft Word documents or pieces of paper which were used later to write the results. Coding was applied

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

to all data to allow me to conceptualize it in a different way (Richards, 2010) and see patterns, trends, and themes. Even though each kind of data was analyzed separately, there was a focus on distinguishing the whole picture that they present as a unit, with a special emphasis on noticing recurrences, major similarities, and general themes (Richards, 2010). The data, coding, and my reflections were recorded electronically and kept in labeled folders to make them effortless to locate and use.

### **Surveys.**

Part 1 questions 1 – 8 were scored for the number of ‘no’ answers and tabulated by hand, and then the results were recorded on a Microsoft Excel document. The data was also organized into charts where appropriate to highlight some important information, such as how many assistant principals were viewed as instructional leaders and the number of teachers who had negative assumptions about instructional leadership. Written comments the participants provided were recorded as well and utilized in Chapter Four. These statements were also considered in the conclusions, suggestions for future practice, and recommendations for future research in Chapter Five.

The teacher demographic data, such as number of years teaching, number of certifications, and number of certifications held, was charted as well and discussed if it was interesting and meaningful. A study by Castellon (2007) found that years of teaching experience had no effect on teachers’ perceptions of administrator leadership but level of education did, which if discovered in this study would be important and useful, possibly

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

leading to interesting actions to minimize that correlation. The data on teacher leadership positions was used to analyze differences between the teacher leaders and those who aren't.

A calculator was employed to score survey Part 2. The number of participants selecting each answer choice was recorded in a table and then divided by 42, the total number of teachers completing the survey, to get a percentage. The average number of participants choosing each answer choice for the questions in each subscale was calculated by dividing the number of teachers choosing each response by the number of questions in the subscale. To compute the percentage of positive and negative responses, the total number of responses for each subscale was added up and then divided by the number of positive responses ('sometimes', 'frequently', and 'almost always') and negative responses ('seldom' and 'almost never').

Just like Hallinger and Murphy (1985), the mean answer choice of each subscale was calculated by finding the average response to each question in the subscale for each of the 42 survey participants and then averaging them. For this calculation, each choice was assigned a number; one for 'almost never', two for 'seldom', three for 'sometimes', four for 'frequently', and five for 'almost always'. This was completed to find out which subscales were perceived to be performed the most and the least routinely. A higher mean score means that the principal was perceived to perform the behaviors in that subscale with more frequency; a lower mean score means that the principal was not viewed as performing the actions in that subscale very often.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Even though this study did not include all of the same questions that Hallinger and Murphy (1985) did, content validity, reliability, and construct validity were still assumed to be present since the 56 questions that were used came from the survey. If any changes were made it was only in wording, not the content. Hallinger and Murphy asserted that the content validity of the instrument was .80 based on the ratings of a group of reviewers; each item was relevant to the requirements of the job. Cronbach's Alpha yielded a reliability coefficient of at least .75. Construct validity was present because statistical analyses revealed that groups of items within a subscale correlated with each other better than with other subscales.

### **Interviews.**

Interviews were recorded using a recording app on an iPad 4 called Voice Record and transcribed by me in order to ensure accuracy and control for bias. I transcribed onto a blank Microsoft Word document or a digital copy of the interview questions. During the interview I clarified the teachers' statements to make sure that they had said everything they wanted to and that their meaning came across correctly. However, once the interview was over I did not employ member-checking. I did not want the interviewees to have second thoughts about something they said and want me to delete or change it. Richards (2010) supports this, "Think through, before you start feedback processes, all the different reasons why disagreement might appear" (p. 187). Doing the transcribing myself allowed me to have a very solid grasp of the data collected and make conclusions as the transcription process was occurring. I utilized Microsoft Word to record these notes. Once the interviews were

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

transcribed, I listened to them in their entirety one more time while checking the transcriptions to make sure they were perfect.

### **Research Validity and Reliability**

#### **Validity.**

Validity and reliability within qualitative research were seriously taken into consideration during this study. Validity, according to Richards (2010) from the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary is “the quality of being well-founded and applicable to the case or circumstances; soundness and strength (of argument, proof, authority, etc.)” (p. 148). Patton (2002) denotes that validity rests with the accuracy to which the data collection instruments measure what they are supposed to measure and “the skill, competence and rigor” (p. 14) of the researcher. In this study, Part 1 of the survey utilized questions that I crafted myself using feedback I attained from other educators on their appropriateness. Part 2 was adapted from a questionnaire that has been previously tested for validity and widely used by other researchers. The survey questions, other than the demographic questions, were directly related to perceptions of instructional leadership and why those perceptions were formed.

I employed several other ways to address validity as well. During the interviews, I repeated statements the teachers made to make sure they were correct and asked for clarification or restatement whenever I was unclear about the meaning or wording that was expressed. Triangulation, or use of “different sorts of data or methods of handling data

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

[which] are brought to bear on the research question[s]" (Richards, 2010, p. 148) and using several kinds of data sources (Patton, 2002), was achieved through the collection and examination of surveys and interviews. I was looking for each type of data to reveal similar pictures of what was going on in order to strengthen my argument for each picture as its own entity (Richards, 2010). Sample size was a factor in validity as well; the larger it is the more soundness can be associated with the study results (Patton, 2002). The goal "is not just to get new ideas, but to establish ideas that withstand challenge" (Richards, 2010, p. 179). This is why my sample included all of the middle school teachers in the district who actively and routinely work with children.

### **Reliability.**

Reliability is the "consistency in results of observations made by different researchers or by the same researcher over time" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 39). Making sure that there is reliability increases the possibility that a study will add practical knowledge to the field. Patton (2002) takes this notion one step further by clarifying that reliability is achieved when the researcher tries "to picture the empirical social world as it actually exists to those under investigation, rather than as the researcher imagines it to be" (p. 53). I have sought to achieve this by examining teachers' perceptions and asking probing questions about why they feel that way. Even though I had certain experiences with teachers at one school having negative perceptions about instructional leadership, I was not imagining that this would be the case across an entire district and truly wanted to know what prevalent perceptions exist whether

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

they are the same as what I experienced or not.

However, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative researchers are most concerned with data accuracy and comprehensiveness, and “tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations” (p. 40). This is one of the goals that I tried to achieve with my study. I was not overly concerned with creating results that could be repeated. Instead, I sought to make a contribution to the existing knowledge base and inspire and encourage new research which dives into this topic further.

To strengthen reliability, I sought to employ clear and valid procedures and Coder Reliability Checking (Richards, 2010). The processes and procedures for the study are explained thoroughly, thus facilitating duplication of my research easily. Coder Reliability Checking, or having others evaluate the coding used to disaggregate the data, was utilized as well. I had two people, one within education and one without, look at my notes, completed data sets (not the original data), and coding systems to give me feedback and suggestions. However, this was done while keeping in mind that the goal of qualitative research is not to be able to replicate the results exactly; it's more important to provide results that readers can have confidence in and depend on. It's also important to me to add to the general knowledge base on instructional leadership and middle school culture as well as inspire new and more in depth research.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Subjectivity Statement**

My experiences as a teacher, assistant principal and principal, and graduate student lead me to and prompted my desire to conduct this study. I spent 21 years as a classroom teacher and worked under seven different principals, so the teacher in me was always prevalent. Working closely with a huge number of teachers with different teaching styles, personalities, experiences, and beliefs over many years, I was able to learn how they perceived many things within the school culture, especially the leadership of the principal.

As a school administrator, I work with teachers and students every day. I am responsible for making sure that the teachers have everything they need to teach their students and for ensuring that the students learn and are prepared for the next grade level. When I was an assistant principal, my principal viewed himself as an instructional leader and wanted his assistant principals to be instructional leaders as well, so instructional leadership was a skill I focused and reflected on constantly. As an administrative team we discussed ways to become stronger instructional leaders at our weekly team meetings, and I was asked to collect data and artifacts that reflect my efficacy and progress as an instructional leader. Now that I am a principal, I believe that I am an instructional leader and strive every day to become a better one. I support my assistant principal as she works to become an instructional leader and support my instructional leadership, and I continue to collect data to support my growth as an instructional leader.

Over the past 21 years my ideas about instructional leadership and strong opinions

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

about the competencies and skills of other administrators as instructional leaders were formed. I observed and critiqued each principal's leadership style, which not only helped me develop my own leadership style and procedures, but also assisted in the construction of firm ideas about and reactions to the effectiveness and appropriateness of their decisions.

As a doctoral student, I learned about the principles of leadership and what makes a strong leader in the classes in which I participated. I have read many studies on school leadership and instructional leadership, and have had the opportunity to talk informally and formally with other fellow graduate students about school leadership. There were a vast number of varying and often conflicting views that were presented in my classes, textbooks and articles I read, and discussions I had with others, so I am frequently thinking about, questioning, updating, and revising my views. I am in a constant state of learning.

These experiences greatly influenced my beliefs and perceptions of instructional leadership and have lead to the construction of some biases. Since I have been both a teacher and an administrator, encountering instructional leadership from the receiving end as well as the giving end, I have highly defined ideas and perceptions of what instructional leadership is. I realize that I may include some actions and decisions in the definition of instructional leadership that other administrators would not, and on the flip side may leave some out that other administrators would include. In addition, I understand that teachers and administrators often have differing values which define what is important to them and what is not. As a teacher I revered having instructional freedom, being trusted as an educator and seen as an

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

expert, and having the time and materials that I needed. But as an administrator my values are now drastically different. I cherish being involved in what is going on in the classrooms, facilitating the teachers' growth and development, ensuring that the teachers have everything they need to bring about student learning and success, and making sure that all students are successful and are learning what they had been taught. I can understand both sides, so I can be biased depending on whom I am interacting with and what the circumstances are.

Thus, I had biases that affected my motivations and reasons for doing this study. I wanted something positive to come out of it, so I may have been biased toward making the study reflect certain ideas or notions, or might have either knowingly or unknowingly left out certain facts and opinions that did not fit in with that. Also, in the mind of a teacher, there is a great divide between teachers and administrators. I view the educational world now through the eyes of an administrator, which might have caused me to interject biases as I was gathering information from teachers.

In addition, there was a bias that I have as a result of reading teacher answers on surveys about my instructional leadership when I served as an assistant principal in a large urban middle school. Since a majority of the teachers in that school felt that instructional leadership was not my responsibility or domain and that I should have left teaching and instructional decisions to them, I had some biases toward middle school teachers in general that I had to diligently suppress. Biases that most teachers had the same opinions might have unconsciously caused me to misinterpret the teachers' statements, and thus bestow a slant on

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

the data that was not really present.

While conducting my study, I employed several controls to try to reduce the impact of my biases on the methods, interpretation, and results. I started with a large sample so I could find out what the perceptions of instructional leadership are from as many teachers as possible. I also sought to ensure that there was representation of teachers from many different backgrounds and subject areas. Triangulation was utilized to give me data from different sources through the use of surveys and interviews. Multiple data sources hopefully revealed saturation of certain facts and details, which would help to remove my personal bias from the analysis and results.

During the interviews, I read the teachers' answers back to them to check for accuracy before moving on to the next question. I took anecdotal notes during the interviews and asked clarifying questions whenever necessary as well. I took care to make sure that my transcriptions were as accurate as possible. Attaining meaningful results is dependent upon attaining critically examined action of all of the participants (Anderson & Herr, 2005).

### **Ethical Issues**

Whenever human beings are involved in research, strict and careful considerations and procedures must be in place to secure their safety and protect their confidentiality and anonymity. During my study, I worked hard to make sure that the participants understood exactly what they were getting in to and what possible risks might occur during or after the

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

study. They agreed to participate after reading an informed consent form before beginning the surveys which covered both completing the surveys and participating in the interviews. These forms included disclaimers that they could refuse to answer any question that they felt uncomfortable with and could drop out of the study at any time. In addition, survey Part 2 included 'prefer not to answer' as one of the choices so the teachers were not forced to answer any of the questions. The participants were also made well aware that I was a beginning researcher, completing this study as a dissertation in order to earn a doctoral degree. Furthermore, being in touch with my values and judgments of what is right and wrong, responsibilities and goals as a researcher, and beliefs about who I am as an administrator and educator also supported me in creating an ethical study.

The returned Part 1 surveys, once printed, were all given a number that was used to identify them and then scored. I started with the number 1 and continued in sequential order. If question #11 was filled out because the teacher was willing to be interviewed, it was cut off once the survey was scored so I could no longer associate that person's responses with their name. If the teacher met the criteria for being interviewed by the number of 'no' answers on questions 1 – 8, it was put in a pile labeled 'to be interviewed'. The others were shredded and disposed of immediately. Part 2 of the survey was numbered the same way. All surveys were kept in a folder in a locked drawer that only I had access to.

The identity of the teachers I interviewed was protected through the use of pseudonyms. I created a list of 8 male and 8 female first names, making sure that none were

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

the same as any of the interviewees' real names. Then as I completed the interviews, I wrote a pseudonym on the top of the interview sheet as I took notes. In order to keep track of the recordings, I made a list of the pseudonyms in the order that I assigned them and labeled them 'Interview 1', 'Interview 2', and 'Interview 3'.

Participants who chose to participate in the interviews were made aware of anything that might affect their decision to take part through the Informed Consent Form and before I asked any questions, such as how long the interview would take, how their anonymity would be protected, and how the interviews were recorded. My questions were designed to reveal information, beliefs, and opinions, but they did not require "intimate accounts of people's experiences" (Richards, 2010, p. 19) and participants were directed both in writing and right before the interview began not to use anyone's name. Direct quotes were used with pseudonyms to protect the participant identity, as advised by Richards (2010). In addition, I kept in mind that interviews are basically interventions and affect people even though that is not the intention (Patton, 2002). Expressing perceptions can lead to people saying things that they would not say in any other situation (Patton, 2002) so I assured confidentiality, listened carefully, and let them finish their thoughts before asking another question, and tried to make a personal connection with the person to make them feel more comfortable by initiating and participating in talk about other subjects.

Ethics of my study was addressed in other ways as well. Executing a well thought out design and revisiting it as the study progressed was essential (Richards, 2010). All IRB

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

forms were filed and were available for inspection at any time. I referred to the study design often to make sure that I was following it with fidelity. I made sure the teachers knew that they were contributing to a study which could help improve conditions at their school and in the district and ultimately lead to higher student achievement. Also, the teachers who participated in the interviews were sent a personal card of thanks and appreciation, along with a five dollar gift card to Target. The data from the study was only accessible to me and my dissertation committee by request. My records were kept in a locked file cabinet or in password protected files during the study; the data from the surveys was housed on the eSurveyspro.com.com website. The data was maintained until the study was completed, and then it was either deleted from my computer, eSurveyspro.com.com, or destroyed with the use of a shredder.

Finally, but still importantly, the study findings and results were written up with fidelity. Even if I did not like the conclusions the data lead me to, I reported exactly what the data revealed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In my view, anything I found out was important, and sometimes the greatest amount of learning can be derived when the information is surprising, unexpected, and contrary to what was anticipated. Above all, I wanted my study to report and explain the true data as it was revealed since real and significant growth comes from being informed, challenged, and truthful.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Limitations of the Study**

Even though this study can shed a great deal of light on the concept of instructional leadership, teachers' perceptions of it, and provide answers to my research questions, it has limitations. The actual sample size was not large enough or representative enough to allow for true generalizability of the results, and the participants were all from just one school district in one state. It was unrealistic to attempt to include the entire population of teachers, and time, fiscal, and other constraints prevented me from acquiring a larger sample or branching out to other counties or states. In addition, generalizability to other levels, specifically elementary and high, was not truly possible given that the participants came only from middle schools and each level is unique and poses special challenges to educators.

Even though Part 2 of the survey accurately measures teachers' views of the instructional leadership behaviors that principals perform, it does not measure the effectiveness of the behaviors. A behavior could have been rated as occurring 'almost always' or 'frequently' that is not performed with a high degree of effectiveness or fidelity, and conversely, a behavior rated as occurring 'almost never' or 'seldom' could have been performed very well. Not all job-related behaviors need to be performed often to be performed successfully (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). So, even though I could report on how often the behaviors were performed, I could not report on whether those behaviors were performed well or make predictions about their impact on perceptions of instructional leadership and on student learning and the school culture.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Researcher bias might have come into play because the topic is one that I am concerned about, knowledgeable of, and invested in. I may have interpreted some of the data in ways that someone else would not or that are inaccurate, and I may not have been able to discriminate between what was important and relevant information and what was not. Also, since I was once a teacher and am currently a school administrator, I may have injected my own opinions, thoughts, expectations, and ideas into the data that are not really there because the data has a lot of meaning to me and I have strong emotions about it.

This study did not present an exhaustive list of the perceptions that some teachers have about instructional leadership and the reasons why some teachers have pessimistic views about it. It was also not possible to generate and present a complete list of suggestions for dealing with these perceptions. My study only just began to scratch the surface, but at the same time it is my hope that it provides some useful and insightful information and indicates that more research is warranted.

Every school community is different, so a strategy or idea that works well in one school or district may not work well in another. The same goes for teachers; some individuals or groups will respond well to certain actions whereas others will not. For example, in my former middle school, some of the change initiatives of the principal were received positively and embraced by the teachers in one grade level but not the others. School leaders will need to use their own knowledge of their staff and school climate in order to decide which of the recommendations I have suggested might be successful and practical

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

in their school.

Finally, the fact that I am a novice researcher might have influenced my procedures, the results, and my interpretations in unconstructive ways. Problems that occurred might have been due to my own inexperience. Thus, my results and findings need to be viewed not as gospel, but instead as merely suggestions and catalysts for future research and exploration.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the methods I used in this study, as well as the research questions, site and sampling information, and data collection and analysis procedures. Reliability, validity, ethical issues, and study limitations were also fully addressed. The stage is now set for the description of the results and findings in Chapter Four.

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Introduction

Chapter 3 detailed the procedures I followed to collect the data for this study. This chapter will show the data and results. So, in order to understand the results, it is important to revisit the two research questions which I sought to answer in this study. The questions are:

1. What perceptions of instructional leadership do middle school teachers possess?
2. Why do some middle school teachers have negative perceptions of their administrators as instructional leaders?

The data from survey parts 1 and 2 were utilized to answer question one, and the interview responses, along with any written comments from survey Part 1, were used to answer question two.

### Results of Survey Part 1

In total, 1,788 surveys were sent out to the middle school teachers from 36 schools in one urban county in North Carolina. Seventy-five of the emails were returned because the email addresses were invalid, meaning the person no longer works for the county, so 1,713 surveys were delivered. The number of Part 1 surveys returned over the two week open period was 59, which is a response rate of 3.44%, and is positive and quite high given the

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

issues with data collection I faced. The county gave no assistance in getting the teachers to participate, and I only had two weeks for the survey because of the graduate school's deadlines. This time crunch prevented me from contacting the principals to enlist their assistance in securing teacher participants and from keeping the survey open and active for a longer period of time. In addition, I wanted to be upfront and honest with participants so I let them know that both parts of the study might take up to an hour to complete, with a maximum time of 90 minutes, which may have seemed like too much time and caused many potential participants to refuse to fill out the survey. However, rich data was collected because the participants were diverse in several ways; they work at different schools with different policies, procedures, norms, and leadership, and thus had a multitude of experiences and knowledge to draw upon when answering the questions, and they work in the largest school district in the state of North Carolina which employs teachers from a wide variety of ethnic, economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Some of the answers that were given are compelling and lead me to make some interesting conclusions and valuable recommendations.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.1

### *Participant Demographic Data*

<b>Gender</b>	50 Female, 8 Male, 1 No Response
<b>Grade Level/Subject</b>	6 Special Education/Intervention/ESL, 14 Elective, 38 Core Subjects, 1 Not Responsive
<b>Years of Experience</b>	42 fewer than 17.5 Years, 17 More Than 17.5 Years 27 Between 5 and 15 Years 13 Between ½ and 4 Years
<b>Years at School</b>	47 fewer than 8 Years, 11 for 9 Years or More, 1 Did Not Answer 29 for 2 Years or Less
<b>Ethnicity</b>	50 White, 1 Hispanic/White, 6 African American, 2 No Answer
<b>Age Range</b>	18 Between 20 – 30, 11 Between 31 – 40, 12 Between 41 – 50, 13 Between 51 – 60, 4 Between 61 – 70, 1 No Answer
<b>NBCT</b>	41 Are Not, 13 Are, 4 Are Pursuing, 1 No Answer
<b>Certifications</b>	15 Have One (Including 1 Provisional), 18 Have Two, 11 Have Three, 11 Have Four, 1 Has Five, 1 Has Ten
<b>Degree Completed</b>	2 Doctorate, 32 Masters, 24 Bachelor, 1 No Answer

Part 1 of the survey included eight questions about instructional leadership and 10 demographic questions. There was also space provided for participants to add written comments to support or explain their answers to the first eight questions. These questions were designed to discover the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding instructional leadership to answer my research questions. The first eight questions were also utilized to choose the interview respondents; teachers with the most 'no' responses qualified since they indicated negative perceptions. Each question was listed in an Excel document on the vertical axis with the responses being the horizontal axis so trends were easily visible. Color

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

coding was applied to highlight trends, similarities or differences, and themes.

### **Questions one through eight.**

*Question 1 – Do you see your principal as an instructional leader?*

Most teachers (31 or 52.54%) answered that they see their principal as an instructional leader, but 25 teachers, or 42.37%, do not see their principal as an instructional leader. Two teachers wrote that they preferred not to answer and one teacher simply did not answer the question.

As I dug deeper into the data, the responses of the 25 teachers who do not view their principal as an instructional leader proved to be remarkable. Most of them were women (22 or 88%), but that doesn't seem to be a factor driving their responses since there were only eight males total who participated in the study. Grade or subject taught didn't seem to have an influence either, as 13 (52%) teach a regular subject and 12 (48%) teach an elective. But the number of years teaching provides some insight. Eighteen of them (72%) have fewer than 12 years of experience, with thirteen (52%) actually having less than seven years of experience. In addition, most of them (18 or 72%) have been at their current school for less than seven years; 14 (56%) for four years or less. The other eight have been at their school for six, seven, nine, or ten years (two at each level or .08%). Only two (.08%) of them have been at their school for longer than ten years; one for 14 years and the other for 20 years.

Seventeen or 68% of the teachers answering 'no' to this question also believe that their assistant principal is not an instructional leader. On the other hand, 20 of 25, or 80%,

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

feel that their administrators should be instructional leaders and instructional leadership entails giving suggestions to teachers on how to teach. However, only six or 24% agreed that instructional leadership should be the main role of an administrator. Only five of them are National Board Certified Teachers, although three of them are currently pursuing it, but 15 (60%) have a Master's degree. The number of certifications didn't turn out to be important, but the fact that all but four (84%) of them have had or are holding two or more leadership roles and consider themselves teacher leaders is noteworthy.

Quite a few of the 59 participants added comments to further explain their response. Participant #1, who answered 'yes', stated, "Although I am not always certain that all of the principals that I have worked with have understood enough of my curriculum to be able to provide leadership. I understand that in theory this is their role and it is my responsibility to follow that leadership." Another participant who also answered 'yes', #13, wrote, "She shares and makes available instructional data, procedures, and dictates school policies regarding instruction." Participant #17 wrote:

I believe the principal is the instructional leader of the school and has the responsibility to address instructional issues when they arise. I do not agree that the principal's job is to come in and change everything about how individual teachers teach if there is not a problem with that person. Requiring certain things to be written on the board each day or procedural changes is one thing, not allowing particular research-based learning activities because the principal doesn't like the activity or

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

doesn't agree with the use of it should not be the focus.

Another comment, added by Participant #21 who also feels that his principal is an instructional leader, recounts how “she is involved in the day to day activities of a principal, but she knows each of her students and staff members.”

One of the participants who answered ‘no’; #20, noted, “They are a visionary leader for the school. They are the ones adapting in the district’s agenda to fit the school’s vision and then pumping it into the school. There are enough people who can talk about instruction; we need some big picture people for a vision for the school.” Participant #24 stated that “middle school is a stepping stone for principals to be administrators in high school. They are not invested in middle school.” A related comment came from Participant #29 who recounted, “I feel as though principals have become more of a means for those outside of the school to spread instructional ideas and mandates. Principals themselves do not seem to be leading in instruction.”

*Question 2 – Do you see your assistant principal (the one with whom you have the most contact) as an instructional leader?*

The majority of the respondents answered ‘yes’, 30 or 50.84%, however, 28 or 47.45% answered ‘no’, so there was only a two vote difference between the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ responses. Intriguingly, the number of participants feeling that their assistant principal is an instructional leader is only one less than the number who feels their principal is an instructional leader. One teacher preferred not to answer.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Several teachers elaborated on their answer. Participant #1, who answered 'no' to the question, added that assistant principals "have always had too many other responsibilities to be involved with curriculum." Many of the comments reflected the duties that assistant principals are usually given. Participant #21, who also answered 'no' to the question, added, "But he is great on the discipline side" and Participant #24 explained that "they focus on buses and discipline." Also answering 'no', Participant #46 wrote "I see my assistant principal as someone who oversees what we are doing and as a disciplinarian for our students." Similarly, Participant #50 included the comment that "our AP has no time to be an instructional leader. Way to busy. I believe if staffing were better our AP would be an excellent instructional leader."

Participant #20, answering 'yes' to the question, noted that "some are better than others, obviously. For the few that are, they have seen so many classrooms and good and bad instructional techniques that they always have an ace up their sleeve to pass on." Another comment by a participant that answered 'yes', #57, was "just came here but so far so good."

For most of the participants, the answers to questions 1 and 2 were the same. Twenty-one (35.59%) of the teachers answered 'yes' to both and 18, or 30.50%, answered 'no'. Seventeen teachers felt that only one of their administrators is an instructional leader (13.56%) and the rest answered either question one or two, leaving the other unanswered.

*Question 3 – Do you believe that administrators should be instructional leaders?*

Overwhelmingly, the most popular response was 'yes', with 53 or 89.83% of the

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

teachers responding this way. Six (or 10.17%) of the participants answered 'no'.

Many of the participants explained their answer further. Participant #3 stated that an administrator should be an instructional leader "only when needed by a teacher who is struggling in the classroom." Participant #29 also answered 'yes' and recounted her personal experiences. "As a beginning teacher I felt as though my administrators really let me down when it came to instruction. I wanted and needed support during those first few years, and evaluations did not help to make me feel more confident as a teacher."

Participant #22 felt that administrators should not be instructional leaders and explained that "It would seem like they have a lot of other things on their plates." However, Participant #15 believes that instructional leadership "is the instructional resource teacher's (IRT) job but administrators need to know what teachers actually do." On the same note, Participant #20 relayed that "teachers should be leaders too so the leadership is dispersed and not concentrated in offices. But if an administrator can't hold their weight in a classroom then our system is flawed."

*Question 4 – Does instructional leadership include giving suggestions to teachers regarding how to teach?*

Once again, most of the teachers (50 or 84.75%) answered 'yes', that instructional leadership does include giving suggestions to teachers regarding how to teach. Eight teachers (13.56%) answered 'no' and one teacher answered 'it depends'.

Some teachers who answered 'yes' included the following comments. Participant #4

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

wrote that “more often it involves them directing us to use Professional Learning Teams and resources to build areas of weakness or to enrich our students.” Participant #13 stated, “By making available instructional tools, time to learn about and practice new instructional methods.”

Others who also answered ‘yes’ believe that administrators should be instructional leaders only under certain circumstances. A condition for being an instructional leader was noted by Participant #17. “Principals should step in if there are instructional issues in the classroom, however, if there are no real problems, they should encourage and not try to change instruction to fit a particular mold or preconceived idea that they have about what instruction should be. Don’t fix what isn’t broken.” Participant #29, answering ‘yes’, affirmed that “if done correctly and with genuine intentions, everyone can benefit from suggestions and feedback on lessons. I’d really like to stress though that this has to be presented in the right light.” Participant #31 noted that “the suggestions given should be centered on data” and #44 described that “they can give suggestions if asked or if an IRT is not available and if they see something that is horribly wrong.” Another comment was given by Participant #46; “I know each classroom is unique and every child is different, but I think it’s important too learn from each other and to give suggestions where it is welcomed.”

Participant #15, who answered ‘no’, explained that “it depends on the amount of time that the administrator has been out of the classroom. They are sometimes too far removed from the daily teaching struggles teachers face.” Likewise, Participant #48 expressed that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

“they have been removed from the classroom for so long they have lost touch with best practices.” Another similar response came from Participant #18, who stated “I think administrators should work harder to understand teachers’ learning styles.”

*Question 5 – Do you agree with the statement: An administrator’s main role in a school is to be an instructional leader?”*

Not surprisingly, given the answers to some of the previous questions, the majority of the participants, or 32 (54.24%) answered ‘no’ to this question. They did not agree with the given statement and alternately believe that an administrator’s main role should be something other than being an instructional leader. However, a fairly large number (25 or 42.37%) agreed with the statement. One participant preferred not to answer, and one other responded ‘not sure’.

Participant #56 elaborated on her ‘no’ answer by adding that there is “so much pressure on administrators and teachers at different levels that there is a breakdown in communication and priorities.” Participant #20 articulated that “there are other aspects of the school they have to address. Community involvement, parent relations, discipline, and proactive vision for a school are other duties they have to have.” Correspondingly, Participant #51 believes “the demands of education (paperwork, new initiatives from “the top”) do not afford that opportunity.” As was expressed in the comments for other questions, Participant #27 communicated that an administrator’s main role in a school should be instructional leadership “only if they have relevant experience in teaching.”

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Two of the participants relayed that other roles are important too and should not be disregarded. Participant #29 wrote, "I do think it should be a role that they have, beyond passing on what they pick up at mandated meetings." The comment from Participant #46 described her belief that "it's important to have someone who is able to run the school. I wouldn't have it be the main role, but it needs to be a bigger role."

*Question 6 – Have you ever asked an administrator for assistance which would be considered instructional in nature?*

The majority of the teachers who participated in this study answered 'yes' to this question, though the difference between the number of 'yes' and 'no' responses was small. There were 33 'yes' responses, or 55.93%, and 27 'no' responses, or 45.76% (one teacher's answer was 'both').

Participant #6 answered 'no' and added, "It has been my experience that most administrators have been out of the classroom for so many years that they are not capable of offering instructional assistance."

*Question 7 – Have you ever used a suggestion from an administrator which would be considered instructional in nature?*

The most common and prevailing answer is 'yes' (46 or 77.97%). Twelve respondents (20.34%) answered 'no' and one response did not include a 'yes' or 'no'. It is interesting that the spread between the 'yes' and 'no' answers is much larger for this question, given the low spread of the previous question. The teachers were more inclined to

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

use a suggestion than they were to ask for one. Participant #59 expressed that she used an instructional idea from an administrator because he or she “spent many years in the classroom and was interested in instructional activities.”

*Question 8 – Have you ever suggested that a colleague ask an administrator for help or advice which would be considered instructional in nature?*

The answer to this question was mostly ‘no’ (35 or 59.32%), but 24 teachers answered ‘yes’ (40.68%). It is remarkable that the majority of the teachers participating in the study stated that they have asked an administrator for instructional suggestions for themselves but would not suggest that a colleague do the same thing. Participant #46 made it clear that she “would most likely suggest a fellow colleague first” and Participant #4 “shared advice that was helpful and instructional” herself.

### **Demographic questions.**

These questions were included in Part 1 of the survey in order to discover trends or commonalities in the teachers who responded. This information might be useful to administrators as they work to become strong instructional leaders and get their teachers on board with decisions they make that are a part of instructional leadership.

*What is your gender?*

The majority (50 or 84.75%) of the respondents were women and eight (13.56%) were men. One participant gave no answer.

*What grade or grades do you teach? What subject(s) do you teach?*

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

I received surveys from a mix of regular education, special education, elective, and support teachers. Thirty-nine (66.10%) of the participants teach math, science, English language arts, or social studies, and 14 (23.73%) teach an elective class such as music, art, physical education, or foreign language (one teacher teaches both a regular subject and an elective). The rest of the teachers (7 or 11.86%) teach special education, intervention, or English as a Second Language, and one response, "middle school", was not counted because the participant did not list the specific subject area(s) taught.

Breaking down the data even further, 34 or 57.63% of the respondents teach only one grade level whereas 24 or 40.68% teach two or more grade levels.

### *How long have you been teaching?*

The majority of the teachers responding to the surveys have been teaching for fewer than 17.5 years (42 or 71.19%), with most of the years of teaching experience falling between five and 15 years (27 or 45.76%). Seventeen teachers, or 28.81%, have more than 17.5 years of experience. Teachers with one half to four years of experience answered the most surveys (13 or 22.03%); almost half of those (6 or 10.17%) have two years of experience.

### *How many years have you been at your current school?*

The majority (47 or 79.66%) of the teachers have been at their current school for fewer than eight years, and most of those (27 or 45.76%) had been at their current school for less than two years. In fact, half or 29 (49.15%), of the teachers who completed a survey

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

have been at their current school for two years or less; eight (13.56%) for less than a year, 10 (16.95%) for one year, and 11 (18.64%) for two years. Only four participants (6.78%) have been at their current school for more than 10 years, and one teacher did not answer.

*What is your ethnicity?*

Most of the study participants (50 or 84.75%) listed White or Caucasian as their ethnicity. One participant stated Hispanic/White as their ethnicity, six or 10.17% listed Black or African American as their ethnicity, and two participants gave no answer.

*What is the range of your age?*

Overall, most of the participants (35 or 59.32%) were between the ages of 31 and 60. But when examining each age range individually, 18 (or 30.50%) of the teachers listed their age range as 20 - 30. Eleven teachers (18.64%) stated their age falls between 31 - 40. For the age range of 41 – 50, 12 (20.33%) teachers chose it. Thirteen teachers, or 22.03%, listed their age range as 51 – 60, and four or 6.77% of the participants listed their age as 61 - 70. One teacher did not record an age range.

*Are you a National Board Certified Teacher?*

Very few teachers (13 or 22.03%) stated that they have earned National Board Certification, and only four or 6.77% listed that they are currently pursuing it. Thus, 41 teachers, (69.49%) stated that they do not have National Board Certification and one teacher did not answer. Given that North Carolina is a national leader regarding the number of National Board Certified teachers, this was surprising to me, although the number of

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

National Board Certified teachers in the elementary level is higher than at the middle school level.

*How many teaching certifications do you hold?*

The most common answer to this question was two (18 teachers or 30.50%), with one a close second; 14 teachers or 23.72%. A large number of the respondents also stated that they have three or four certifications; 11 or 18.64%. One participant listed that she has five certifications and another stated that she is a Lateral Entry teacher and has only a Provisional certificate. Another listed 10, but since this is an extreme outlier, the response may have been a typographical error or a misinterpretation of the question.

The large number of teachers with multiple certifications was not surprising to me because many middle school teachers like to earn multiple certifications so they are more marketable for a job, and many college programs require that the students prepare to earn two compatible certifications such as social studies and English language arts or math and science. Only five (15.15%) of the 33 respondents who teach non-elective classes hold only one certification. In addition, special education teachers are often required to hold multiple licenses since they can be assigned and are often needed to teach more than one subject. Each of the six (10.17%) special education or intervention teachers who completed the survey holds either three or four certifications.

However, the data shows that the majority of participants (10 or 16.95%) who teach an elective subject such as physical education, art, or family and consumer sciences hold only

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP  
one certification. This is 71.43% of the total number of teachers who hold only one

certification in the study. These subjects are highly specialized so the teachers often have no need for other certifications, especially if they have no interest in teaching in any other area.

In addition, these certifications are often multi-level, for example an art teacher is certified to teach grades K – 12, so the teacher has the flexibility to teach students of different ages if a change is desired.

*What leadership roles do you currently hold? If none, but you have held leadership roles in the past two years, please indicate this and list the roles you have previously had.*

Altogether, 51 teachers (86.44%) indicated that they currently hold and/or have held leadership positions within their school. The majority of the participants (17 or 28.81%) stated that they have held, or are currently holding, at least two leadership positions within the school. The next most common response was one leadership position held by 13 or 22.03% of the teachers, and then three leadership positions held by 10 or 16.94% of the teachers. Two participants (or 3.38%) listed that they hold seven leadership positions, three people (or 5.08%) stated that they hold four or five leadership positions, and one person indicated that he/she has six leadership roles. Three of the participants (5.08%) didn't list any leadership roles and six (10.16%) stated 'none'.

To facilitate greater understanding of the data, I have split the teacher leadership roles listed by the participants into two types; traditional and non-traditional. A traditional teacher leadership role is any role that is appointed or chosen by the principal/other administrator or school/district leader. These roles are given to particular teachers based on specific qualities and/or abilities they possess, and may require the teacher leaders to make decisions, preside

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

over meetings, make presentations, and manage another group of teachers/adults. On the other hand, non-traditional teacher leadership roles are those that are open to any teacher on a voluntary basis or are leadership roles in the sense that the teacher is in charge of a group of students.

### *Traditional Leadership Roles Listed*

Department chair (18 or 30.50%)  
Team leader (16 or 27.11%)  
School Improvement Team (15 or 25.42%)  
Leadership Team (12 or 20.33%, two teachers specified being the chair of this team)  
Mentor (7 or 11.86%, one teacher specified being the school coordinator)  
Response to Intervention Team (4 or 6.77%)  
Data Team (4 or 6.77%, one person noted being the chairperson)  
Professional Learning Team Leader (3 or 5.08%)  
Positive Behavior Interventions and Support Team (3 or 5.08%, one person listed being the chairperson)  
Administrative roles (3 or 5.08%, two listed Instructional Resource Teacher, one person listed having been an assistant principal and a principal)  
Administrative Advisory Committee (2 or 3.38%)  
Central Office – Social Studies Representative, writing county assessments and lesson plans (2 or 3.38%)  
Staff Development Chair  
Athletic Director  
Presenter at local and state conventions and meetings  
Student Support Team  
Curriculum Coordinator

### *Non-Traditional Leadership Roles Listed*

Coach of a Sport (6 or 10.16%)  
Technology Team (3 or 5.08%)  
Beta Club Sponsor (2 or 3.38%)  
Student Council Advisor (2 or 3.38%)  
Child Find Chairperson  
Calendar Committee  
Sports Safety Technician

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Yearbook Advisor  
Intervention Teacher, Math Coach, Resource Teacher  
National Junior Honor Society Advisor  
Club Advisor  
Various Committees  
Testing Coordinator (this is usually a responsibility tied to a certain position)  
Relay for Life School Representative  
Art Club Teacher  
Literacy Team  
LEP Contact (this is usually the role of the ESL teacher, and an ESL teacher listed this role on the survey)

### *Leadership Roles Previously Held*

Eight teachers (13.55%) indicated leadership roles that they have held within the last two years. Half of them (4 or 50%) stated that they currently hold leadership positions as well.

School Improvement Team (3 or 37.50%, one co-chair and two members)  
Mentor (2 or 25%)  
Leadership Team Member (2 or 25%)  
Media/Technology Committee  
Staff Climate Committee  
Department Chair  
Data Team Member  
Central Office Administrator  
Student Support Team  
Head Coach  
Literacy Leader

Unfortunately, four responses were not recognizable/definable and could not be placed into either category; 'teacher leader', 'MS vocal music', 'LEA Officer' and 'TTRR'. The first three were listed in conjunction with other leadership roles, the last one was the only role listed.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

*What is the highest degree you currently hold?*

The most frequent answer to this question was a Master's degree, with 32 or 54.24% of the teacher participants listing it. Twenty-four or 40.67% of the teachers recorded that they hold just a Bachelor's degree. Two of the respondents (3.38%) hold a doctorate and one indicated that she holds two Bachelor's degrees. Many years ago the number of degrees a teacher possesses may have been viewed as significant, but today, many students continue right on to earn a Master's because their program requires it, to be competitive in our ruthless job market, or they have gotten scholarships that allow them to do this cost free or at a greatly reduced cost. It is very common nowadays for new teachers to hold a Master's degree.

### **Results of Survey Part 2**

#### **Framing school goals.**

Of the 1,713 Part 2 surveys that were sent out, 42 were returned, which is a response rate of 2.45%. These questions were utilized to answer my first research question by probing a bit deeper into the participants' beliefs regarding how often they perceive that their principal engages in certain behaviors which have been designated as behaviors of an instructional leader. Results for the most frequent responses are specified, as well as the average number of teachers choosing the positive responses ('sometimes', 'frequently', and 'almost always') and the negative responses ('seldom' and 'almost never'). The answer

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

choice 'prefer not to answer' was not included in the calculations because it does not reveal any perceptions. Results for certain individual questions are pointed out as well if they were compelling and have the potential to be useful to administrators as they analyze and reflect upon their own instructional leadership behaviors to decide which they are performing as often as necessary and which they need to perform more. All of these behaviors are crucial to leading instructionally and ensuring student growth and learning.

*Questions one through five* assessed the teachers' perceptions of framing school goals. Specifically, the questions asked how often your principal:

1. develops academic goals with target dates of completion to improve student performance? Academic goals are goals that have to do with instructional practices.
2. uses needs assessments/surveys to get staff input on academic goals?
3. develops academic goals that are easily translated into classroom practices by teachers?
4. utilizes data on student academic performance when creating the school's academic goals?
5. makes clear your responsibilities in achieving the academic goals?

Table 4.2

*Responses to Questions 1 – 5, Framing School Goals*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>1</b>	4 (9.52%)	3 (7.14%)	9 (21.43%)	13 (30.95%)	10 (23.81%)	3 (7.14%)
<b>2</b>	4 (9.52%)	10 (23.81%)	7 (16.67%)	16 (38.10%)	4 (9.52%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>3</b>	4 (9.52%)	5 (11.90%)	11 (26.19%)	17 (40.48%)	4 (9.52%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>4</b>	1 (2.38%)	2 (4.76%)	4 (9.52%)	14 (33.33%)	20 (47.62%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>5</b>	3 (7.14%)	4 (9.52%)	8 (19.05%)	15 (35.71%)	11 (26.19%)	1 (2.38%)

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

An average of 24.8 of the participants completing Part 2 of the survey believes that their principal engages in behaviors that frame school goals at least 'frequently'. The choices with the highest average number of people choosing them are 'frequently', chosen by an average of 15 people, and 'almost always', chosen by an average of 9.8 people. Notably, the difference between the average number of people choosing 'frequently' and 'almost never' is large. There were 163 positive responses, which accounts for 80.30% of the 410 total responses, while negative responses only accounted for 19.70%.

For question #1, academic goals have target ending dates, and question #5, teacher responsibilities in achieving academic goals are made clear, there was a small number of participants responding negatively. Participants were the least negative about question #4, utilizes data on student academic performance when creating the school's academic goals, which only had three people choose 'almost never' or 'seldom' but twenty chose 'almost always' (with a total of 38 teachers actually answering this question positively when the number of responses for 'sometimes' are added in). On the other hand, the responses to question #2, using needs assessments or surveys to get staff input on academic goals, are much more evenly spread.

*Questions six through ten* explored how well the principals communicate school goals. How often does your principal:

6. communicate the school's academic goals to staff?
7. refer to the school's academic goals in informal settings?
8. refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular or instructional decisions with teachers?

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

9. make sure the school's academic goals are visible/displayed in the school?
10. communicate the school's academic goals to the students?

Table 4.3

*Responses to Questions 6 – 10, Communicating School Goals*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>6</b>	1 (2.38%)	6 (14.28%)	3 (7.14%)	10 (23.81%)	21 (50%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>7</b>	5 (11.90%)	4 (9.52%)	7 (16.67%)	18 (42.85%)	7 (16.67%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>8</b>	2 (4.76%)	7 (16.67%)	9 (21.43%)	14 (33.33%)	8 (19.04%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>9</b>	7 (16.67%)	8 (19.04%)	7 (16.67%)	9 (21.43%)	9 (21.43%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>10</b>	6 (14.28%)	9 (21.43%)	9 (21.43%)	10 (23.81%)	4 (9.52%)	4 (9.52%)

This group of questions also was rated as occurring 'frequently' or 'almost always' by the largest number of the teachers. Individually, an average of 12.2 of the respondents answered 'frequently' and an average of 9.8 of the participants answered 'almost always'. Together these choices were chosen by an average of 22 of the participants. An average of 72.5% of the teachers in the study chose positive choices, while only 27.5% chose negative responses. The difference between the average number of people choosing 'frequently', the most popular choice, and 'almost never', the least popular choice, is very large.

Examining the individual questions separately, question #6, communicating academic goals to staff, had 21 responses of 'almost always' while only one teacher answered 'almost never'. It's also interesting to note that only seven teachers chose a negative answer to this

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

question. For question #7, referring to the school's academic goals in informal settings, the answer 'frequently' was chosen more often than for any other question in the subscale. The responses to question #9, making sure the school's academic goals are publicly displayed, are very evenly spread, and for question #10, communicating the school's academic goals to the students, more participants chose negative answers than 'almost always' and 'frequently', and only four chose 'almost always' which is the lowest in the subscale. Also, though the number of participants preferring not to answer the individual questions in this subscale is low, four decided not to answer this question.

*Questions 11 – 17* sought to ascertain how often principals supervise and evaluate instruction. Specifically, these questions asked how often your principal:

11. conducts informal observations in the classrooms?
12. ensures that teachers' goals align with the school's academic goals?
13. attends meetings such as PLT, team, grade level, and subject area?
14. points out teachers' instructional strengths?
15. points out teachers' instructional weaknesses in a constructive way?
16. pays attention to student time on task and discusses it with teachers?
17. provides feedback on specific instructional practices?

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.4

*Responses to Questions 11 – 17, Supervising and Evaluating Instruction*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>11</b>	1 (2.38%)	6 (14.28%)	8 (19.04%)	18 (42.85%)	7 (16.67%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>12</b>	3 (7.14%)	3 (7.14%)	7 (16.67%)	16 (38.10%)	12 (28.50%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>13</b>	4 (9.52%)	3 (7.14%)	8 (19.04%)	11 (26.19%)	15 (35.71%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>14</b>	5 (11.90%)	4 (9.52%)	11 (26.19%)	12 (28.50%)	8 (19.04%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>15</b>	5 (11.90%)	5 (11.90%)	12 (28.50%)	10 (23.81%)	3 (7.14%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>16</b>	6 (14.28%)	7 (16.67%)	10 (23.81%)	12 (28.50%)	4 (9.52%)	3 (7.14%)
<b>17</b>	5 (11.90%)	10 (23.81%)	12 (28.50%)	6 (14.28%)	5 (11.90%)	2 (4.76%)

The largest average number of participants rated their principals as ‘sometimes’ or ‘frequently’ performing actions to supervise and evaluate instruction. ‘Frequently’ was the most common response with an average of 12.14 participants choosing it; ‘sometimes’ was the second most common response with 10.71 participants choosing it. Collectively, an average of 22.85 teacher participants chose ‘frequently’ and ‘sometimes’. Overall, an

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

average of 78.10% of the responses was positive and an average of 24.45% of the responses was negative. Once again, the difference between the most frequently chosen answer of 'frequently' and the least frequently chosen answer of 'seldom' was great.

Only seven teachers chose a negative answer for #12, ensures that teacher goals align with the school's academic goals, and six people chose a negative answer for #11, conducts informal observations in the classroom, and for #13, attending meetings. It's also notable that 15 teachers chose 'almost always' for this question, which is decidedly higher than for any other question in the subscale; no other question had more than eight teachers choose 'almost always'. For question #17, providing feedback on specific instructional practices, the responses were more evenly distributed amongst all five choices and more teachers chose the negative answers than 'frequently' and 'almost always'.

*Questions 18 – 22* were targeted toward assessing how often principals are involved in coordinating the curriculum. How often does your principal:

18. make clear who is responsible for coordinating the curriculum school wide?
19. use the results of school wide testing to make curricular decisions?
20. ensure that the goals of special programs are coordinated with the school's academic goals?
21. monitor the classroom curriculum to make sure it aligns with the school's curricular objectives?
22. participate actively in the selection of curricular materials?

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.5

*Responses to Questions 18 – 22, Coordinating the Curriculum*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>18</b>	4 (9.52%)	4 (9.52%)	7 (16.67%)	16 (38.10%)	10 (23.81%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>19</b>	0	6 (14.28%)	6 (14.28%)	12 (28.50%)	15 (35.71%)	3 (7.14%)
<b>20</b>	1 (2.38%)	1 (2.38%)	18 (42.85%)	9 (21.43%)	8 (19.04%)	5 (11.90%)
<b>21</b>	2 (4.76%)	9 (21.43%)	8 (19.04%)	15 (35.71%)	6 (14.28%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>22</b>	6 (14.28%)	12 (28.50%)	11 (26.19%)	6 (14.28%)	4 (9.52%)	3 (7.14%)

For this subsection, an average of 21.6 of the teachers chose either ‘sometimes’ or ‘frequently’ to describe how often their principal performs actions that are geared toward coordinating the curriculum. ‘Frequently’ was the most common response with an average of 11.6 participants choosing it, and ‘sometimes’ was the second most common response with an average of 10 participants choosing it. The difference between the most recurrent response of ‘frequently’ and the least common response of ‘almost never’ was not as large as for the previous subscales. Positive responses account for 77.04% of the total responses while negative answer choices account for just 22.96% of the total responses.

It is evident that the perceptions about using school-wide testing data to make curricular decisions, question #19, were tremendously positive since no one chose ‘almost

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

never' and only six participants chose the other negative answer, 'seldom'. This is also true of #20, ensuring that the goals of special programs coordinate with the school's goals, in which only two teachers selected a negative response. However, a decidedly large number of participants selected 'sometimes', which is more than the number who chose 'frequently' or 'almost always'. In addition, five participants chose not to answer this question, which is the most for the section. While the answers for the other questions in this subsection are mainly positive, they are not for question #22, participating actively in the selection of curricular materials. The majority of the responses are negative or 'sometimes', and only 10 were 'frequently' or 'almost always' for this question.

The next set of questions, *numbers 23 – 28*, examined the teachers' perceptions of how often their principal monitors student progress. How often does your principal:

23. meet individually with teachers to discuss student academic progress?
24. discuss item analysis of tests with the staff to identify strengths and weaknesses in the instructional program?
25. use assessment results to assess school progress toward school academic goals?
26. discuss assessment results at least monthly?
27. identify students whose assessment results indicate a need for enrichment or remediation?
28. help with finding appropriate programs or techniques to use with students whose assessment results indicate a need?

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.6

*Responses to Questions 23 – 28, Monitoring Student Progress*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>23</b>	6 (14.28%)	9 (21.43%)	11 (26.19%)	4 (9.52%)	3 (7.14%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>24</b>	8 (19.04%)	11 (26.19%)	10 (23.81%)	8 (19.04%)	2 (4.76%)	3 (7.14%)
<b>25</b>	0	4 (9.52%)	7 (16.67%)	18 (42.85%)	12 (28.50%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>26</b>	3 (7.14%)	5 (11.90%)	18 (42.85%)	11 (26.19%)	3 (7.14%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>27</b>	4 (9.52%)	6 (14.28%)	14 (33.33%)	14 (33.33%)	3 (7.14%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>28</b>	6 (14.28%)	7 (16.67%)	15 (35.71%)	10 (23.81%)	3 (7.14%)	1 (2.38%)

The largest average number of respondents, 24.66, chose either ‘sometimes’ or ‘frequently’ to depict how often their principal engages in monitoring student progress actions. ‘Sometimes’ was the response most commonly chosen with an average of 13.83 participants choosing that answer; ‘frequently’ was the second most frequently chosen response with an average of 10.83 participants selecting that answer. It is interesting to note that the difference between the average number of people who chose ‘almost never’ and ‘frequently’ is relatively small, and overall the choice ‘almost always’ was chosen the least frequently and the choice ‘sometimes’ was chosen the most in this subscale. The majority of the responses are positive, accounting for 70.64% of the total number of responses, while negative answers account for 29.36% of the total number of responses. However, the

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

negative responses collectively were chosen more often for this subscale than for any other subscale.

When looking at the questions individually, there are some interesting occurrences to be pointed out. Nineteen teachers chose a negative answer for question #24, discussing item analysis of tests with the staff to identify strengths and weaknesses in the instructional program, whereas only 10 chose 'frequently' or 'almost always' and 10 chose 'sometimes'. For question #25, using assessment results to assess school progress toward school academic goals, no one selected 'almost never' and only four participants chose the other negative answer, 'seldom'. In addition, it's worth pointing out that more people (18) chose 'frequently' for this question than for the others in this subscale. For question #26, discussing assessment results at least monthly, only eight teachers chose a negative answer and just three chose 'almost always'. The choice 'sometimes' was chosen more often for this question than for the others in this subscale.

The next four, *questions 29 – 32*, were grouped together because they dealt with protecting instructional time. They investigated how often the teachers felt that their principals:

29. limit the amount of interruptions of school wide announcements?
30. have procedures in place to reduce the number of times students are called to the office?
31. have consequences in place for students who are habitually tardy or leave school early?
32. follow up on intrusions to instructional time or when instructional time is not being used wisely?

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.7

*Responses to Questions 29 – 32, Protecting Instructional Time*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>29</b>	1 (2.38%)	3 (7.14%)	10 (23.81%)	9 (21.43%)	18 (42.85%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>30</b>	2 (4.76%)	6 (14.28%)	13 (30.95%)	8 (19.04%)	11 (26.19%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>31</b>	6 (14.28%)	6 (14.28%)	10 (23.81%)	10 (23.81%)	8 (19.04%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>32</b>	5 (11.90%)	7 (16.67%)	14 (33.33%)	10 (23.81%)	4 (9.52%)	2 (4.76%)

An average of 22 teacher participants selected ‘sometimes’ or ‘almost always’ to demonstrate how successful their principal is with protecting instructional time. ‘Sometimes’ was chosen most commonly, by an average of 11.75 of the participants, and ‘almost always’ was chosen second most commonly, by an average of 10.25 of the participants. The difference between the average number of people who chose positive answers and negative answers is large. A vast number of the total responses, 77.64%, are positive, but only 22.36% of the responses are negative.

For question #29, limiting the amount of interruptions of school wide announcements, only four teacher participants chose a negative answer, while 18 chose ‘almost always’, which is the highest across the entire category. Fourteen people chose ‘sometimes’ as their answer to question #32, following up on intrusions to instructional time or when instructional time is not being used wisely, which is the highest in the subscale. The responses are the most evenly divided for questions #31, having consequences in place for students who are

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

habitually tardy or leave school early, as well as for question #32, following up on intrusions to instructional time or when instructional time is not being used wisely.

*Questions 33 – 37*, categorized together because they ask about maintaining high visibility, expressly asked teachers to rate how often their principal:

- 33. builds relationships with teachers and students by talking with them?
- 34. visits your classroom at least once a week?
- 35. attends and/or participate in extra-curricular activities?
- 36. covers classes when needed?
- 37. tutors or provide instruction or assistance to students?

Table 4.8

*Responses to Questions 33 – 37, Maintaining High Visibility*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>33</b>	2 (4.76%)	2 (4.76%)	12 (28.50%)	8 (19.04%)	17 (40.48%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>34</b>	11 (26.19%)	7 (16.67%)	7 (16.67%)	5 (11.90%)	11 (26.19%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>35</b>	2 (4.76%)	1 (2.38%)	7 (16.67%)	15 (35.71%)	15 (35.71%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>36</b>	20 (47.61%)	5 (11.90%)	9 (21.43%)	2 (4.76%)	5 (11.90%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>37</b>	21 (50%)	7 (16.67%)	8 (19.04%)	4 (9.52%)	0	2 (4.76%)

Though maintaining high visibility within the school is an essential part of being an instructional leader, it is obvious that it is an action that many teachers don't observe their

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

principal performing regularly. An average of 11.2 respondents chose 'almost never' for this subscale. However, it is notable and attention-grabbing that the second most popular answer was 'almost always', with an average of 9.6 participants choosing it. It is also worthwhile to note that 'sometimes' had the third highest average number of respondents (8.6) choosing it and that overall, the average number of teachers choosing each response are more evenly distributed than for any other subscale. The percentage of positive answers, 61.58%, is the smallest of all of the subscales, while the percentage of negative answers is 28.47%, is the second highest of all of the subscales.

A closer investigation of the individual questions yields more revelations. Question #33, building relationships with teachers and students by talking with them, was answered positively by 37 respondents, which is the highest in the subscale (although this same number of teachers answered positively to question #35 as well). The responses were most evenly distributed for question #34, visiting classrooms at least once a week. For question #35, attending and/or participating in extra-curricular activities, 'frequently' was chosen by 15 teachers, which is significantly higher than for any other question in the subscale, and only three people chose either 'almost never' or 'seldom' as their answer. Twenty respondents chose 'almost never' for question #36, covering classes when needed, with the total of negative responses being 25, while only 16 teachers chose a positive answer choice. For question #36, tutoring or providing instruction or assistance to students, the answers were the most negative in the subscale. Twenty-eight of the participants chose either 'almost never'

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

(21) or 'seldom' (7), while only 12 chose a positive answer; eight chose 'sometimes' and four chose 'frequently' (no one chose 'almost always').

The smallest area, providing incentives for teachers, included *questions 38 – 40*.

How often does your principal:

- 38. recognize superior instructional performance by teachers publicly?
- 39. compliment teachers privately for their efforts or performance?
- 40. reward teacher performance with leadership roles and/or opportunities for staff development?

Table 4.9

*Responses to Questions 38 – 40, Providing Incentives for Teachers*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>38</b>	7 (16.67%)	7 (16.67%)	10 (23.81%)	9 (21.43%)	8 (19.04%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>39</b>	7 (16.67%)	2 (4.76%)	8 (19.04%)	12 (28.50%)	12 (28.50%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>40</b>	4 (9.52%)	5 (11.90%)	19 (45.23%)	4 (9.52%)	9 (21.43%)	1 (2.38%)

Regarding this subsection, the most popular answer choice was 'sometimes', with an average of 12.33 teacher participants choosing it. The next most selected answer choice was 'almost always', with an average of 9.67 people choosing it. The two most common answers combined were chosen by an average of 22 of the participants. Of the 123 total responses, 73.98% are positive while 26.02% were negative. Overall, the responses for this subscale are

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

relatively evenly spread, as is evident in question #38, recognizing superior instructional performance by teachers publicly and question #39, complimenting teachers privately for their efforts or performance. Questions 39 and 40 have the highest number of responses (32) in the subscale for 'frequently' and 'almost always', the largest number of responses for 'sometimes' (19), and the lowest number of responses for 'almost never' and 'seldom' (9).

The next section, promoting professional development, had the largest number of questions; 41 – 48. These questions asked teachers to assess how often their principal:

41. makes sure teachers know about professional development opportunities?
42. selects professional development workshops that are consistent with the school's academic goals?
43. considers teacher requests for professional development?
44. integrates professional development into staff meetings?
45. supports use of skills acquired in professional development (for example by purchasing needed items)?
46. ensures that teacher assistants have access to/are provided professional development?
47. attends professional development activities in the school?
48. provides teachers opportunities to share instructional ideas and practices with the staff?

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.10

*Responses to Questions 41 – 48, Promoting Professional Development*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>41</b>	1 (2.38%)	2 (4.76%)	8 (19.04%)	14 (33.33%)	16 (38.10%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>42</b>	2 (4.76%)	3 (7.14%)	10 (23.81%)	14 (33.33%)	12 (28.50%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>43</b>	2 (4.76%)	1 (2.38%)	14 (33.33%)	11 (26.19%)	12 (28.50%)	2 (4.76%)
<b>44</b>	1 (2.38%)	3 (7.14%)	6 (14.28%)	15 (35.71%)	17 (40.48%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>45</b>	5 (11.90%)	4 (9.52%)	15 (35.71%)	9 (21.43%)	8 (19.04%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>46</b>	4 (9.52%)	8 (19.04%)	4 (9.52%)	10 (23.81%)	5 (11.90%)	11 (26.19%)
<b>47</b>	3 (7.14%)	3 (7.14%)	10 (23.81%)	15 (35.71%)	10 (23.81%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>48</b>	1 (2.38%)	3 (7.14%)	15 (35.71%)	14 (33.33%)	9 (21.43%)	0

The results for this subsection are overwhelmingly positive, with an average of 34.13 participants indicating that the principal promotes professional development ‘frequently’ or ‘almost always’. The average number of participants was the highest for ‘frequently’ (12.75) and ‘almost always’ (11.13). Adding in the average number of teachers selecting ‘sometimes’ (10.25), the total average number of teachers choosing a positive answer is 34.13. The percentage of positive responses is 85.58%, the highest of all of the subscales, and the percentage of negative responses is 14.42%, the lowest of all of the subscales. Thus,

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

the difference between the average number of participants selecting positive answers and negative answers is large. Five of the eight questions were answered 'almost never' or 'seldom' by only five or fewer teacher participants.

Question #41, making sure teachers know about professional development opportunities and question #43, considering teacher requests for professional development were answered negatively by only three participants. But question #46, ensuring that teacher assistants have access to/are provided professional development, was answered the most negatively, with four teachers answering 'almost never', eight answering 'seldom', and only 19 teachers opting to answer 'sometimes', 'frequently', or 'almost always'. This was the only question in the section that had fewer than 33 teachers choose a positive answer and had 11 teachers choose 'prefer not to answer'.

*Questions 49 – 52* surveyed teachers on their thoughts about how often their principal develops and reinforces academic standards. How often do you believe your principal:

49. sets and communicates high standards for all students?
50. sets standards regarding utilizing all available time for instruction?
51. enforces a promotion program based on mastery of academic standards?
52. supports teachers when they enforce academic policies such as grading, homework, or promotion?

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.11

*Responses to Questions 49 – 52, Developing and Enforcing Academic Standards*

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>	<b>Prefer Not to Answer</b>
<b>49</b>	0	2 (4.76%)	11 (26.19%)	14 (33.33%)	15 (35.71%)	0
<b>50</b>	0	3 (7.14%)	10 (23.81%)	12 (28.50%)	16 (38.10%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>51</b>	7 (16.67%)	9 (21.43%)	9 (21.43%)	7 (16.67%)	7 (16.67%)	3 (7.14%)
<b>52</b>	1 (2.38%)	2 (4.76%)	10 (23.81%)	13 (30.95%)	13 (30.95%)	3 (7.14%)

As with the subsection about professional development, the positive responses of ‘sometimes’, ‘frequently’, and ‘almost always’ were chosen the most frequently, with an average of 34.25 of the teachers choosing them, with ‘frequently’ and ‘almost always’ having the highest average of teachers selecting them (11.5 and 12.75 respectively). The spread between the answers of ‘almost never’ and ‘almost always’ is very large. Interestingly, the total percentage of positive responses for the subscale is 84.57%, which is the second highest for all of the subscales, while the total percentage of negative responses for the subscale is a mere 14.81%, which is the second smallest of all of the subscales.

This is the only subscale in which two questions, #49, setting and communicating high standards for all students, and #50, setting standards regarding utilizing all available time for instruction, didn’t receive an answer of ‘almost never’. In fact, question #49 earned

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

the highest number of positive answers (40) and the fewest number of negative answers (2).

The answers to question #51, enforcing a promotion program based on mastery of academic standards, were the most evenly distributed.

The final four questions of this part of the survey, *numbers 53 – 56*, explored the concept of providing incentives for learning. These questions distinctively asked how often your principal:

- 53. recognizes students who meet school academic standards publicly?
- 54. uses assemblies to honor students for their academic successes?
- 55. contacts parents to communicate improved or excellent academic performance?
- 56. comments on students' good work and/or effort (for example, when in classrooms or halls)?

Table 4.12

### *Responses to Questions 53 – 56, Providing Incentives for Learning*

Question #	Almost Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always	Prefer Not to Answer
<b>53</b>	1 (2.38%)	3 (7.14%)	6 (14.28%)	15 (35.71%)	16 (38.10%)	1 (2.38%)
<b>54</b>	1 (2.38%)	6 (14.28%)	14 (33.33%)	9 (21.43%)	12 (28.50%)	0
<b>55</b>	4 (9.52%)	7 (16.67%)	13 (30.95%)	6 (14.28%)	4 (9.52%)	8 (19.04%)
<b>56</b>	3 (7.14%)	5 (11.90%)	14 (33.33%)	9 (21.43%)	10 (23.81%)	1 (2.38%)

The response of 'sometimes' was given most frequently by an average of 11.75 participants, and the response of 'almost always' was given second most frequently by an average of 10.50 participants. The combination of the responses 'sometimes', 'frequently',

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

and 'almost always' were chosen by an average of 32 teacher participants. Once again, the spread of average number of participants choosing the positive answers and the negative answers is large. The total average of positive answers is 81.01%. The total average of negative answers is 18.99%.

The total number of negative responses for question #53, recognizing students who meet school academic standards publicly, is the lowest in the subscale at just four (one for 'almost never' and three for 'seldom') and the number of positive responses for the subscale is the largest, at 37 (six for 'sometimes', 15 for 'frequently', and 16 for 'almost always'). The number of negative answers is the most elevated for question #55, with four teachers choosing 'almost never' and seven choosing 'seldom', for a total of 11, and not surprisingly, the number of positive answers is the smallest for this question; 13 'sometimes', 6 'frequently', and 4 'almost always', for a total of 23. In addition, eight participants chose not to answer question #55, which is the most in the subscale.

Across all of the subscales on the adapted PIMRS, 'frequently' was the answer with the highest mean response (5 or 45.45%). 'Sometimes' had the next highest mean response (4 or 36.36%). 'Almost never' and 'almost always' were the most frequent responses for merely one of the subscales (9.09%). The answers are centered around the mean or the choices in the middle of the Likert scale, indicating that there were not many strong feelings either in the positive or the negative about instructional leadership behaviors in this study.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.13

*Most Frequent Responses for Each Subscale*

<b>Mean Response</b>	<b>Subscales</b>	<b>Number of Subscales</b>
<b>Almost Never</b>	Maintaining High Visibility	1
<b>Sometimes</b>	Monitoring Student Progress Protecting Instructional Time Providing Incentives for Teachers Providing Incentives for Learning	4
<b>Frequently</b>	Framing School Goals Communicating School Goals Supervising and Evaluating Instruction Coordinating the Curriculum Promoting Professional Development	5
<b>Almost Always</b>	Developing and Enforcing Academic Standards	1

Next, as performed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), the mean response was calculated for each of the 56 questions for Part 2 of the survey, and then the average for each subsection was calculated to discover which subscales are perceived by the teachers to be performed the most and the least frequently. For this calculation, the answer choices are thought of in terms of a number; one for 'almost never', two for 'seldom', three for 'sometimes', four for 'frequently', and five for 'almost always'. Actions in the subscales with a mean closer to five are believed to be performed more frequently (a greater number of 'almost always' and 'frequently' answers were given) while a mean closer to one indicates that the action in the subscale is believed to be performed less often (a greater number of

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

'almost never' and 'seldom' answers were given). The areas of Promoting Professional Development and Developing and Enforcing Academic Standards, with means of 3.38 and 3.30 respectively, were perceived to be performed the most frequently, while Maintaining High Visibility and Monitoring Student Progress, with means of 2.65 and 2.77 respectively, were perceived to be performed the least frequently.

Table 4.14

### *Average Teacher Ratings and Rank for Each Subscale*

<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Framing School Goals	3.20	3
Communicating School Goals	3.00	8
Supervising and Evaluation Instruction	3.09	6
Coordinating the Curriculum	3.10	5
Monitoring Student Progress	2.77	10
Protecting Instructional Time	3.02	7
Maintaining High Visibility	2.65	11
Providing Incentives for Teachers	2.92	9
Promoting Professional Development	3.38	1
Developing and Enforcing Academic Standards	3.30	2
Providing Incentives for Learning	3.18	4

### **Results of Interviews**

Out of the 59 teachers who filled out survey Part 1, 21 of them gave responses that met the requirements for the interview. This data is displayed in the chart below.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.15

*How Teachers Qualified for the Interview*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Number of Surveys</b>
'No' answers for all questions 1 – 8.	1
'No' answers to at least two of the first three questions and 'no' to at	17
'No' to at least one of the first three questions and 'no' to two or more	3
At least three 'no' answers on questions 4 - 8	0

The survey Part 1 responses of the 21 participants who qualified for the interview are presented in the table below.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Table 4.16

### *Part 1 Responses of the Teachers Who Qualified for the Interview*

Participant #	Is your principal an instructional leader?	Is your AP an instructional leader?	Administrator or should be instructional leaders	Does instructional leadership include giving suggestions on how to teach?	Agree that instructional leadership is the main role of an administrator?	Have you asked for instructional assistance from an administrator?	Have you used an instructional suggestion from an administrator?	Have you suggested that a colleague ask for instructional help from an administrator?
1	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
3	No	No	Both	Both	No	No	No	No
6	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
7	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
9	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
10	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
11	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
12	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
15	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
19	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
22	No	Yes	No	Not sure	No	Yes	Yes	No
24	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
27	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
29	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
33	No	Both	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
34	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
44	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
46	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
49	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
54	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
59	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
% 'No'	80.95	90.50	33.33	33.33	95.20	71.43	33.33	76.19

Not surprisingly, a majority of these teachers do not see either their principal (80.95%) or assistant principal (90.5%) as an instructional leader. This data corroborates most of the previous studies on assistant principals. In addition, 95.20% believe that instructional leadership should not be the main role of an administrator. Interestingly, only 33.33% of them also feel that administrators should not be instructional leaders and believe that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

instructional leadership includes giving suggestions on how to teach.

Examining the data further, 13 of the 21 participants (61.90%) who qualified for the interview responded to five or more of the eight questions on Part 1 with a 'no' answer. Six or (28.57%) participants had five 'no' answers, three (14.29%) had six 'no' answers, and one (9.52%) had seven or eight 'no' responses. The chart below shows their responses and some of the pertinent demographic data.

Table 4.17

### *Partial Part 1 Results for Participants with Five or More 'No' Replies*

#	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Years Teaching	Yrs. at	Age Range	NBCT
3	No	No	Both	Both	No	No	No	No	6 yrs.	6 yrs.	20 - 30	No
6	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	22 yrs.	10 yrs.	51 - 60	?
9	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	2 yrs.	2 yrs.	31 - 40	No
10	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	13 yrs.	1 yr.	41 - 50	No
11	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	12 yrs.	3.5 yrs.	51 - 60	CP
15	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	18 yrs.	3 yrs.	41 - 50	No
24	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	7 yrs.	7 yrs.	31 - 40	Yes
27	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	25+ yrs.	20 yrs.	61 - 70	No
29	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	6 yrs.	6 yrs.	20 - 30	CP
33	No	Both	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Less than 1	Less than 1	20 - 30	No
44	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	9 yrs.	3 yrs.	41 - 50	CP
46	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	2.5 yrs.	Less than 1	31 - 40	No
59	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	16 yrs.	9 yrs.	51 - 60	No

A majority of the teachers who had mostly 'no' answers have taught for at least seven years (53.85%) and are not National Board Certified teachers (61.54%). Seven of them (53.85%)

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

are at least 41 years old; four are over the age of 51. It is interesting to note that of the four teachers in the study who are pursuing National Board Certification, three of them qualified for the interview, demonstrating negative views of instructional leadership. Only one teacher with National Board Certification has more than five 'no' responses; in fact she was the teacher who responded 'no' to each of the questions 1 – 8.

Of the 21 teachers who qualified to be interviewed, only four actually agreed to be interviewed. I contacted all four via email and was able to arrange to interview three of them. I never heard back from the fourth teacher. The three interviewees were all female. Each of them had a copy of the questions in front of them during the interview.

### **Question 1.**

*What is instructional leadership? What do administrators do if they are instructional leaders? What does instructional leadership look like?*

Michaela asserted that instructional leaders “look at the data and if there isn't data they find ways, not necessarily then in particularly, but, um, they lead or guide teachers to help and possibly develop that goal um to fill out a plan for that goal and then carry out that goal.” She also stated that instructional leaders are “visible within the classroom and even more so they are providing feedback to the teachers and to the students and that feedback um comes in the form of being both positive and constructive.” She went on to elaborate that when feedback is constructive “it will again guide or redirect the teacher toward the goal or help the teacher tweak what they're doing to reach the overall arching goals.”

Jacqueline repeated some of the opinions expressed by Michaela, but also stated some

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

new ones. "I think that instructional leadership is really closely related to trying to get best practices being done at your school, um, on a really regular basis. Um, I think that part of that is visibility as far as the principal and the administration is concerned and being present in classrooms and seeing what's going on. I think another part of it too is, is finding a genuine way to provide, whether it be feedback..." In addition, she relayed that "I think it's, it's part of instructional leadership, it's about getting the teaching part, not the everything else part, at the forefront of everybody's mind because that's why we're there." Then she elaborated on that idea and said that instructional leadership needs to include "in any shape or form, focusing on teaching and instruction at hand versus a lot of other things that tend to pull people away, whether that be discipline or separate issues that can detract from teaching itself."

Madison echoed some of the same actions as the other two teachers. "Well, I think an instructional leader is someone who gives other people advice and shares best practices and um ways they can help other teachers better their, uh, craft." However, she added that she does not feel that her principal demonstrates a great deal of instructional leadership. "I see his role as something different in our school. The APs have given me, maybe it's just the relationship or the reasons that he and I interact. I don't know, I I feel like I've gotten more instructional leadership from two of the APs than from the principal himself." As she explained more, she acknowledged that "maybe it's just coz I've had the opportunity to ask them things." It was evident that the assistant principals in this school fill the role of

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

instructional leader for Madison. “And when the APs have given me what I consider to be instructional leadership, um, I’ve gone to one of them asking questions about, they’re really kind of new teacher questions, you know, like 15 of these 17 kids didn’t turn in three assignments even though I’m remind them and what do you think I should do? I’m still asking a lot of what do you think I should do questions and so I get a lot of guidance in that way.”

### **Question 2.**

*Do you think that your vision of an instructional leader and instructional leadership is the same as your principal’s? Your assistant principal’s? Other teachers on staff? How do you know?*

### ***Principal.***

According to Michaela, “I think that with my principal, in theory yes...I think there are some parts though that are still developing for this principal.” Her view is somewhat skewed and she was actually not sure with her answer because her former principal was principal of the year for that state and in her assessment was a “top notch principal”.

Jacqueline started by articulating that her principal is fairly new and she is “trying to get a kind of a read on where this person stands with that and at the moment it seems there is so much more that this person is focused on than instruction. Um, I hear very little about that.” She made it clear that instruction is not mentioned in “meetings and emails and things that I’m given” and concluded that “I don’t think that my principal thinks that their role is to, geared to providing, that sort of direct feedback from principal to teacher and that sort of

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

really clear conversational sort of way.”

Madison's first response was nothing more than “Yeah I guess. I would imagine he would.” So I reworded the question and prompted her a little more. “You know, I honestly don't know. I don't really see him giving a lot of leadership to teachers in that way. But I don't always observe him with other teachers a whole lot. So, I don't know.”

### *Assistant principal.*

Michaela was not totally sure because she has only been working with her assistant principal for a few months, but she said, “I would say probably a similar response”.

Jacqueline echoed Michaela's response, but went much more into depth.

I think with that it's even worse. Um, I see my assistant principal on a really regular basis and they come into my classroom, but their role it seems is even less focused on that because they seem to be tied up in all those other things than around teaching.

The one that I have that does my, um, professional observations every year, uh, at the point where I'm at they only check for Standard 1 and Standard 4, and in those opportunities for them to come in there isn't much conversation there either about instruction.

As she continued she elaborated on these points.

It's about being a leader, and things that I don't feel like they're giving me feedback in that realm. Um, I, I don't know, and I don't know if it's just my school. But it seems like the administrator is so tied up in everything else that instruction is not

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

something that they feel the need to talk to their teachers about. And I think that that's not a good thing. They want to create opportunities for teachers to be instructionally related with one another whether that's through a PLT or through, um, walkthroughs where we go in our planning and be with other teachers, but when it comes to the administrator themselves and their experience previously as an educator, I don't see that connection.

Once again, Madison's reply was to the point and did not contain much elaboration or details. "I think so. No, I think so. I think that especially two of my APs have been giving me a lot of instructional support. So yeah, I would say, I would probably have a more definite idea that they would share that view." Even with prompting, she did not add anything else.

### *Teachers.*

Regarding the teachers, Michaela was the most sure about her response and was able to give a lot of support for her response. "Teachers on staff, I would say less like overall no I don't believe that they do because I don't see a lot of data driven decisions and I don't see a lot of purposeful acquired data." She then gave a specific example.

For example our school does a universal screener and I can speak from last year and this year and this year we have just taken it, um, the first week of school and that data is still being compiled. But last year I never saw it brought up again or used for, used in the sense of oh wow, our kids are much higher than we thought so we need to, you

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

know, up the ante or vice versa. Nor did I see it used to see okay these students are at this level, you know, let's divide these up into levels and then what, how we're gonna instruct these students differently.

However, then she switched back to referring to the administration again. "I think that kinda goes back to the administration too, to help guide that, um, coz teachers aren't used to that way of thinking. Um, I don't know that every teacher does that naturally, especially that hasn't been done...or they have never been held accountable for that."

Jacqueline had the opposite view of Michaela. "Yeah, I think that's where we're kinda strong, um, with the way that our PLTs are designed, whether or not you, people, work completely, um, together or its independent, there's a lot of opportunity there to share and to exchange and to get feedback. And that's not necessarily just within my grade level content PLT." She declared that this kind of cooperation occurs within the departments as well, and added, "There's a lot of opportunity there for us to, um, create an environment that's focused on instruction, and I think that's where I see the most of it with at my school."

Madison seemed to take this question in a different way than it was intended. She took it literally and as a result felt that "I don't know if I can answer what they think. I'd rather not answer because I just don't know."

### **Question 3.**

*Do you believe that administrators should be instructional leaders? Please explain. If yes, what specific actions or strategies should administrators do to be instructional leaders (note if repeat from #1, note those actions that were not listed above)?*

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Michaela was definite in stating that “I think administrators are the instructional leaders or leader for the school. I mean, if they are not, then the question is who is?” Then she added some specific actions or strategies that administrators should do to be instructional leaders. “...definitely, um, developing an overall vision or goal or mission. However, you want to word that for the school, but not necessarily singlehandedly; working with the school.” She also added that instructional leaders should be “overseeing PLT meetings or department meetings”, making sure that “the teachers feel valued and that instructional time is also valued”, and “carrying out the goals of the schools; so they would be the ones to help set and direct the different committees.” Michaela also pointed out that communication is key as well. “I think also just communication, and of course that comes from being at those meetings, um, but communication in the sense of here’s where we are, you know, the status of the school, um but also like I said before, they’re being visible within the school building and within the classrooms and communicating with the teachers. What they’re doing well, um, and ways they can even maybe get better. Um, I think it’s it’s the communication that’s gonna come in many different forms that’s important as well for an instructional leader.” She made a point of emphasizing the notion of support as well.

...it’s not that they are there leading them, but they’re there in support. I was at a school where the administrators attended every department meeting, every, um, any type of school leadership meeting. They were at everything, and it wasn’t that they were micromanaging; they were there so we could ask questions. It was really

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

embraced; the school was all working toward the same goal and if resources were needed for something, you know, the principal was there to support that and just kind of guide us as needed, and again not micromanaging.

Feeling the same way, Jacqueline detailed her experiences, as well as iterated some different reasons for her opinions. "I think they should, and I don't know if my perspective is a little bit skewed, but in my world, if you're a principal that means that at one point you must've been a pretty good teacher because you felt the need to go to this next level and be able to lead teachers and lead your school." Then she continued, "So I've always kind of looked to them, especially when I was newer, for that kind of feedback. Coz I was under the impression that, you know, they would, they would work that into the many, many hats that they would wear." Jacqueline summed up her thoughts by saying that "I think that's something that's very important in their, uh, jobs, that sometimes might get pushed to the side or can be pushed to the side, and there are other things that cannot."

Once again, Madison's answer was succinct. "Well, yeah, I think that they, especially if they evaluate you. Um, I think it's their role to help you and then set best practices for the school. So, yeah."

### **Question 4.**

*Do you believe that your principal and assistant principal(s) is (are) an instructional leader(s)? If differences are noted, they will be probed further.*

It was evident that Michaela's experiences at her current school are much different than the experiences she had at her previous school because she made references to that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

often. "Having come from a school that was in my thinking much more advanced in that area, I see it as something that is developing, but it's not to what I'm used to." Thus, she has a strong sense of what instructional leadership looks like and what instructional leaders do, and actively makes comparisons between what she knows and expects and what she sees and experiences on a daily basis. "It's developing, um, and it's partly because it's somewhat new to the school, but also a lot of the administration is also new to the school. And so it's kind of getting your feet wet and establishing that rapport and the relationship with the staff here." Then she elaborates more and repeats the notion of working toward shared goals. "You're building trust so it's a lot easier when you have that trust in the relationship, um, and that you're all working toward the same goal. And I think that's still being established right now."

Jacqueline had a similar answer. "I think they have the potential to be, but they don't fulfill it in the way that I would want. And like I said earlier, I I feel like there, there should be an avenue for direct communication between those people and their leadership roles and myself as a teacher. And I don't think that occurs at my school."

"Yeah, I would say the APs," Madison stated. Her answer was strongly based on her own experiences. "I would say definitely, yeah, they have the capacity to, I just don't know that all of them have filled that role with me. But that doesn't mean that they don't, it just means that maybe I haven't interacted with them in that role." I reworded her statement to clarify, and she replied, "Yeah."

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Question 5.**

*Do you think other teachers in your school feel the same way? How do you know? Why or why not?*

Michaela utilized another specific example to help answer this question.

I think overall the answer would be no, and a lot of it is because again um it's more like for example with the PLT meetings it's more we're meeting because we have to and they're not being productive. Like we're not really not getting, where, um, a lot of times it's just more announcement things that have or they could've been sent in an email. Um, there is, I just am not seeing a lot of data driven decision making, or it's minimal. Um, and I think that the teachers are just bombarded and express more, I'm gonna use the word disdain, and that's very negative.

She also added that "the quantity of the meetings that we have, whether special education or it's because of having a staff or faculty meeting, department meetings, grade level meetings, um, it's just there's a sense of overwhelming with the meetings, the paperwork, that it's kind of hard to see past all of that." At the end she added, "Sometimes I feel that we do a lot of menial meaningless things, um, and I feel that our time could be better used to support the students."

Unlike Michaela, Jacqueline feels that the teachers she knows the best would feel the same way as she does. However, she is not sure that they "want their administrators to be an instructional leader in the sense that I do." She went on, saying "Um, I think that most people are very clear where there's that lack of, uh, support isn't the right word, but at some

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

point in time they would agree that the way they could be suggested, but I don't know if they necessarily want it."

Since I was not exactly sure what she meant by her answer, I asked her why she feels that way.

I think part of it is related to their personal opinion about the effectiveness of that person as an administrator, and they would therefore deduce that maybe they weren't that great of a teacher or um, I think maybe some people are a little bit more independent and they have something really good going with their PLTs who's down there, you know, with the kids and sees what they know and what they don't know and what they can and cannot do. And maybe they would feel like their administrator would be out of touch with that.

Her final thoughts were somewhat disjointed and difficult to understand, but she managed to state clearly that "the, uh, impression that I get from them [teachers] as to their, um, opinion of the administration, and I mean I don't know, opinion is a pretty strong word, but the feeling that they get from that person on whether or not they'd be competent at doing a good job at this."

This question evoked a similar response from Madison as she had given on question number two. "I don't know. I don't like to answer for other people. I'd have to say I don't want to answer that one." Then she asked me to leave out any questions that related to how teachers feel and think, so I did that moving forward in order to respect her feelings and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

preserve the courteous relationship we had at that point.

### **Question 6.**

*What do you think is the most important role of an administrator? Why?*

Michaela was thoughtful with her response. "Um, I don't honestly know if my decision might be influenced just by the first question, um, but I do believe that they are instructional leaders and in just general they are leaders and um, the purpose of school is for students to learn." A real life example was then used to further illustrate her point.

Just as a CEO at a major company, they're goal is to essentially make money, our goal is to have, their goal is to make more money and our goal is for students to learn more and make process. And so, um just like a CEO is going to be the leader who guides the employees to find ways to make more money for the company, the administrators are going to be the ones who guide others within the school to make progress like learning progress with the students.

Jacqueline declared that "administrators are supposed to be leaders and representatives of the teachers they oversee. Um, and I, they would fulfill that in a variety of ways. it's not just fielding parents saying, you know, parents call and want to talk, but I think that it also does fit into this role of being an instructional leader." Then she used some examples to illustrate her claim further.

I think that if you are the leader of your teachers, so for instance, you are the 6<sup>th</sup> grade principal and you oversee this whole group of teachers, you're your job is to lead

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

them in all sense of that word whether it be with procedures, or discipline, or instruction, or expectations of the students. They should follow the same expectations of the teachers otherwise the whole thing will fall apart. Uh, I kinda look at it as almost like a social hierarchy in a way, with the principal and assistant principal kind of being at the top, and the need to, you know, set the standard for everyone else. Um, I I I it can be done in a positive way. I mean, obviously, if you do any of those things in a negatively connotative or way or in a way that may step on someone's toes, it very quickly can turn into something else.

Continuing on, she concluded that,

I think that part of signing up to be an administrator is acknowledging that you can be a leader and that people are going to look to you for whatever that may be that they need. I don't know if within the training to become an administrator if there is much time spent on instructional leadership in general. I I think there's so much more with um, the the noneducationally related tasks that a principal or an assistant principal has to handle in the course of a day that maybe, I mean, I don't know what the curriculum looks like for that, but it just seems like maybe that gets sidestepped for something else.

Madison utilized her experiences to formulate her answer. "Well, I think it depends on which administrator you are talking about because I think that they all have different roles. In our school they all seem to have different roles. Um, the principal seems to be different

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

than, you know, two of the APs.” She went on to say that “two of them deal with student discipline and one of them kind of deals with the teacher side, deals with the teachers. So she is definitely an instructional leader. And I have actually have gotten a lot of help from one of the other APs.” After pausing for a few seconds she continued to explain her thoughts.

I don't, I guess I see the role of our principal not so much as that being his primary role. At least that's not what I have observed. Um, he does a lot of things dealing with community and parents and um um school operations. I view him more as an operations person I guess. It's like he has other people who fill that instructional role under him. We have a beginning teacher program and we have a mentorship program. You know my mentor is definitely an instructional leader for me.

Wishing to probe these ideas further, I asked her if this is the way it should be. “I don't know what should be, I know it works at our school and I'm not unhappy with our principal in any way. He does a fabulous job and I'm just so new and I'm not, I'm lateral and I come from the business world.” Then she added, “When I look at the leader of an organization, I view that a little bit differently than someone who's been a teacher forever. The things that my principal is involved in are things that I expect, um, a business leader to be involved in. Operational type things, staffing type things.” As she continued, she touched upon the idea that there are other people available to be the instructional leaders in her school. “You know, and it would seem like, um, kind of being an instructional leader is something that um, that he's not capable of, but that he doesn't seem like that is his primary

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

responsibility because there are people under him to do that for him under him in their role.”

Wanting to explore this further, I asked her if it's desirable to have other school leaders take on the role of instructional leader so the principal doesn't have to. She replied, "Yeah, that's what I, that's exactly what I'm getting at because the system that we have, that is the system...one of our APs is the IRT and, you know, all the new teachers have mentors and and we, you know, we have all of the meetings where we talk about things. And it's not that the principal is in those meetings, you know, when we have, when we meet for our improvement goals. And when he brings up all of the testing data, uh, the benchmark data, we talk about and we discuss all of these things for improvement. So his line of instructional leadership always seems to be about the bottom line. You know, kind of the bigger things. His instructional leadership is the bigger picture. He's not gonna come tell you to manage your classroom or how to be a classroom manager, or, you know, how to write a lesson plan. He doesn't get into the nitty gritty of it. There are people who can help me do that."

The fact that Madison is a lateral entry teacher, meaning that she has a degree outside of education and is working on becoming certified as a teacher, and comes from the business world had a huge impact on her response.

His instructional leadership is much more overarching big picture, and that's kind of what I would expect coming from where I come from in the business world...I draw a

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

lot of parallels...if they don't think what they are doing is a business, they're crazy as it is. The principal, he's the leader of the organization, and especially today, there are so many things that have to be done, um, to bring other things into a school that are more businesslike. You know, like the corporate partnerships and finding grants and funding and, that's the role, that's the larger role that I see the principal doing today. And that's his real value. That's what I would want him to do. I don't need, I don't need him, what a waste of his time to come in to my class, and not that he doesn't come in to my classroom, he does, but that's not my expectation of him. You know, he's the face of the school so I have other expectations of him. It works quite well actually.

### **Question 7.**

*Do you think other teachers feel the same way? How do you know? Why or why not?*

Michaela felt quite sure that other teachers feel the same way as she does and affirmed that "from different teachers that I've spoken with they have the same viewpoint". She explained, "I think more people do see and want the administrators to be the leaders. They want to have the feedback and am I doing it right, am I doing a good job?" She then added that "most teachers want to know that and that if they're not they want to not get a slap on the wrist but been given the feedback so they can improve."

I probed that answer further by asking her if a leader needs to be an instructional leader in order to give feedback to teachers properly. After some reflection, she responded,

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

“I think it is possible but less likely as well as less impacting. Um, I believe that teachers are going to value and respect...an instructional leader’s viewpoint or um feedback, whatever it might be, far more than someone who is not.” An analogy was used to further illustrate her opinion. “I can go to a general practitioner or I can go to, um, you know, a more specialized doctor, and if I have a problem I’m gonna value the specialized, you know the specialist more, because they know more and they would probably give me more feedback than the general practitioner.”

Jacqueline felt that some teachers would agree with her. “I work with people who have been teaching for years over the top of my age, um, so you know where they may stand may be slightly different than me. Um, I think that most would say though that the job of an administrator is to support their teachers in whatever fashion that may be.” Additionally, she added that this agreement would depend on the “relationship with their assistant principal or their administrator.”

Picking up on the hint about a possible difference in opinion between more and less experienced teachers, I asked her about that. “I think that it plays a role, you know, I have, I have been teaching for awhile but not nearly as long as some of the people that I’ve encountered. But I think that I, in the amount of time I have been teaching my role, uh, rather my view as to the role of an administrator has changed.” As she went on, the affect of administrators on their teachers became apparent. She admitted that her “view as to the role of an administrator has changed not necessarily because I wanted to change it or because I

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

changed my mind, but because I became accustomed to what actually administrators took care of at my school and adapted my uh, um, my expectations for them.” Then she affirmed,

Whereas I think someone with, who has been teaching longer and been exposed to more administrators and styles of leading schools and the conversations we've had about the way things were before 2001 and before the Common Core, before all the standardization of teaching that maybe things have changed over time and their view of the situation would be different. I just, you know, they tend to talk about the way things used to be in comparison with what they are now and the good old days so to speak. And I kinda wonder how things were then and how things have changed in older teachers' perspective since everything has changed.

Due to Madison's previous request, she was not asked this question.

### **Question 8.**

*Do you think that there are teachers who do not feel that administrators should be instructional leaders? How do you know? Why do you think that is the case?*

Though Michaela believes that other teachers in her school don't see their administrators as instructional leaders, she feels that they would like them to be. “I would say no...they voiced ‘I want more feedback, I'd like to have that.’” I asked her for more details and she ventured somewhat off course when she added, “What I have observed is that when you have an instructional leader then your staff and faculty start to create their own initiative that follow what the instructional leader is aiming for.” Continuing on, she recounted, “Whereas when there isn't as strong of instructional leadership a lot more people

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

just do the status quo or do just enough, um, but they're not going, they're not taking initiative to do as much on their own. It's more just do what I have to do or do what's told of me. There's not as many initiatives or ideas of how to do things."

Once again, Jacqueline grounded her answer by her own beliefs. "Um, I would venture that some teachers feel that way...maybe they don't hold the ideals that I do. In my mind, that if you became an administrator you must've done a good job as a teacher." She also felt that "part of it too, is depending on the administrator and what you personally teach; there may not be a strong connection there. Especially if you're, uh, teaching sort of an elective or you know, in a less common field of expertise. You know, you're not going to get the kind of feedback that a math teacher might get if you teach band." Jacqueline summed up her response by stating "people have different expectations, I imagine, based on what they're faced with every day in their classrooms and how challenged they are to teach the material that is expected of them."

Madison was not asked this question due to her reluctance to make and/or share her opinions on how other teachers feel.

### **Question 9.**

*Do you feel that instructional leadership usurps teachers' expertise or control? Explain.*

Michaela was not as steadfast with her answer to this question. "Yes and no. I think it's largely dependent on how, how someone is going to respond to the feedback or suggestions, or just using feedback as an example, how someone is going to respond to that."

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Continuing, she added, "...do they recognize what type of person, you know, what type of person that teacher is, and how, um, for example if a teacher could've maybe taught a lesson differently and their students might've responded more positively to it, does that principal know that teacher well enough to know how to guide that teacher." However, Michaela was strong in the conviction that principals should not tell a teacher "your lesson wasn't really that good and you're going to get low ratings at your formal observation or just, you know, I'm worried about the way you're teaching" but should instead "know how to reach that teacher just in the way that we would expect the teacher to know how to reach individual students. There might be a need for differentiation in instruction, or in the case of an administrator in the presentation or communication."

On the other hand, Jacqueline was more certain.

I don't think it does...uh, at my school it certainly does not. You know, because I don't feel the administrators are prevalent or or pushing in that direction of my job. I think though even if they were more involved in my teaching, that they should not supersede my decisions as a classroom teacher as far as what I want to do. Um, maybe four or five years ago they tried to mandate, this was the previous batch of people entirely, but they wanted us to choose, um, reading strategies, and do a different reading strategy every week and you know, get the kids to try all of that. And so many of us were really frustrated with this mandated use of a particular reading strategy that I can see how if an administrator did that would be very

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

frustrating for me.

Then she continued and elaborated a bit,

I feel like when you're as a teacher you find things that work and you find things that you like and you find things that for the age group of students that you possess and the ability level of the students you possess work and you stick with those things.

You can try new things, absolutely, but you shouldn't be forced to do that. Especially in the world of high stakes testing now, where you know in the long run these numbers on paper are what is being used to to evaluate me. I think that any sort of feedback is always wonderful if done appropriately, but you know the ultimate decision is up to the teacher. That's why they're there to make those decisions.

Though Madison did not want to answer questions about how the teachers feel and what they believe, she was willing to answer this one. "Well, I don't think so. I personally have never felt that way, but I'm so new and I'm so open to everything...when they give us new tools to use and when they do professional development it's always done on a larger scale. So I never feel like it's threatening in any way." She added, "And I don't ever get the vibe from people that they think it's threatening or anything like that, um, but I can only speak from my sense." Her perspective is mainly driven by the fact that she is a beginning teacher. "I don't ever feel, I've had people come in and say 'you should ask questions in a different way' and as a beginning teacher and as somebody who is lateral entry and not, and still being trained in the pedagogy of all of it, I always enjoy their comments and I like

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

looking at things from a different perspective.”

### **Question 10.**

*What administrative actions that would be considered instructional in nature can be perceived negatively by teachers?*

Michaela's previous answers highlighted the feedback and evaluation process often, and this answer was no different.

I think one that pops into mind; I can think of at least three occurrences right off the bat that were all really similar. It involves the evaluation instrument, and in relation to how these three were evaluated. And then when, um, an explanation was requested, at first none was given, um, and then when it was, it was just a copy and in one, in one instance, it was a copy and paste of what the evaluation tool already had written on it. Um, and it just, it was more just an innocent question, it was I just would like an explanation of what this means, like how come I got this rating and what do I need to do in order to work toward that. In another person a similar situation was given a marking that was less than expected and when trying, it again was kinda just given, well that's more or less, it was kinda that's just the way it is, it isn't possible right now to get something more or to get a higher ranking. But not really explained how to go about that.

Then another analogy was utilized. "...a student asking to do something or asking why I got a C on this report that I turned in and the teacher just saying well your rubric says this, just restating what the rubric says but not really explaining it or just saying that's just what you

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

got, you should've worked harder, you should've done better. But it wasn't really answering the question." Then she shifted gears by affirming, "I think it goes in with communication."

Just like Michaela, Jacqueline honed in on communication as the basis of her answer also. "I think that if you don't have a conversation with the teacher regarding whatever you're concern or even just the nature of feedback is...that if you step in you may be perceived as stepping on toes or overstepping your bounds. Um, I think that if a teacher approached you and felt comfortable approaching you about a situation that any feedback you could give, you know, would be good." Subsequently, she included more details.

But if I found a piece of paper in my school mailbox that said 'try this' with no context or conversation, I'd feel a little bit miffed, you know, why is this in my box? What did you see that would lead you to believe that I needed this, or just being friendly, or you know what's the context of this. Uh, I think that in order to be an instructional leader you have to assert yourself as this open communicator and in it for the best interest of the students. Not as someone who's trying to say 'no, you're not doing it right, you should do it this way'. I just think that in order to have a positive role of an instructional leader, you have to first set the standards for your purpose, your intent, and maybe even just scope out demeanor of teachers. You know, obviously, uh, different teachers react in a variety of ways to the feedback.

Jacqueline continued by expressing that "some of us are very sensitive and some of us are very open, and others, you know, it's somewhere in the middle. You kinda just have to

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

set that stage and know your teachers. There's no one size fits all for this sort of thing...you can't just hand out stuff to us, you know, we're all very different and we require different things."

Madison's self-proclaimed inexperience and newness as a teacher once again influences her answer. "I can't really, I don't know, because again, I'm just so new. And anything that, I mean our administrators are just really kind and I'm, they're all either southern and I'm not, I'm from Philadelphia, so I tend to just kinda say what I think and I'm used to folks just saying what they think so they're just really kind." As she continued, she elaborated on the effect that the kindness she spoke of has on the faculty. "I keep asking them to put more words around some things and um, sometimes I think they're almost afraid to do that. They don't want to hurt people's feelings." Then, she intimates that her perspective is different due to her background. "I do see things differently because I come from the business world, where things are rougher between colleagues I think. So I don't know. I'm lovin' my job so I don't think anything negative."

### **Question 11.**

*Can you describe a situation when one of your administrators demonstrated instructional leadership that was perceived negatively by some teachers (this may include yourself)? A time where the action was perceived positively?*

#### ***Perceived negatively.***

Michaela could not describe a negative situation. However, Jacqueline was able to. "Um, the only thing I can think of for the negative question is what I was saying earlier about

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

the mandated use of a specific reading strategy...even if you just look at the content areas in which we teach not everything works in every classroom and not everything works with every group of students.” She concluded with, “When an administrator would mandate something, you have to do this, that becomes kind of difficult for me to wrap my head around coz I think come on, teachers are supposed to be flexible and you be flexible as well. Mandating the use of something is not that in any sense of the word.” I asked her to elaborate more on the outcome of the mandated reading strategy initiative since it was instructional in nature. She replied,

Well, in their mind, we were supposed to do this and then submit feedback on it to create binders. We all instituted these reading strategies but the kids got fed up with it and putting the teachers between a rock and a hard place. The end result never came to fruition. In the long run it gave me more reading strategies, but I didn't need to be forced to do something to know if it was good. I don't remember any culminating thing or that everyone got to see it. It ended and that was the end of it.

### *Perceived positively.*

Michaela once again noted communication as a key action in instructional leadership. “...good communication and follow through and speaking up for teachers at meetings when parents can get kind of a little bit, um pushy, I guess you could say, or degrading.” She added that “but really, a principal who again communicates and values what how you use your time and what you're doing. I just think I've heard a lot of positive things about really

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

kind of being there as a support for teachers whether that was in relation to just when working with parents or um in your instruction as well.”

Another analogy Michaela recounted was about a principal who would support teachers during a meeting with parents. “The principal would not expect you to stay until the parents are satisfied, you know, she would step in and speak up for those in attendance and say we need to make a decision, helping process through the meeting, keeping it focused.” Jacqueline could not recount a positive situation, and Madison was not asked this question given her request and reluctance to answer other questions relating to how other teachers feel or what they assume.

### **Question 12.**

*What can administrators do to change teacher perceptions about instructional leadership?*

Michaela replied,

I think it's very similar to a teacher trying to guide students to learn, you know, to learn and then want to learn, um, is that you're communicating by providing feedback. But it's genuine feedback; it's not just well you did a great job or that lesson was great, but giving specifics. ‘I really like how you did this or the students really responded well when you did this, or I noticed that you've worked to set up your classroom so that students are um, you know, among people that they can work in a group with, whatever the specific feedback might be. But I think that any person is going to appreciate feedback that is genuine and specific.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Then she continued to elaborate on the concept of the necessity for feedback to be genuine. "It isn't just, uh, I'm gonna give you positive feedback just to give you positive feedback. Because if that teacher, uh, that administrator is being genuine, and they really do believe that what that teacher was doing was done well, then that teacher is gonna continue to do that and continue to find ways...so it builds your confidence."

Jacqueline led off by commenting on relationship building. "I think that for starters, I mean if you have the right relationship with your staff you can approach them about that and say you know this is something that I'd like to work towards and something that I'd like to focus part of my day to day or week to week activities on. And you could elicit teacher feedback for starters, you know." Then she referred to giving feedback on observations.

Instead of just appearing in my room and staying there for 10 minutes and never hearing anything about it, stop by and ask me about it. Say 'hey, I stopped by and I saw that you were doing this and it worked well', and if you see that it didn't here's your opportunity to offer suggestion without necessarily stepping on my toes. I think it's a lot of what I was saying earlier, it's just about communication. How many people are coming in our rooms all the time to look at what we're doing but we very rarely hear back about what they saw or what the end result was...it would need to be something that's an active role in their minds and in their duties in the course of the day. I mean obviously it might not be something they can do every single day. You know, you should be aware of what your teachers are doing and what your teachers

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

are teaching.

As she spoke, her feeling that a principal's teaching experience "would make it even more possible to chat about instructional sort of things. You have to start with the right foundation." Furthermore, Jacqueline warned that becoming an instructional leader should be "a very slow stepping sort of process, you're your intentions are very straightforward and clear and genuine, you know, people will respond to that." Then Jacqueline intimated that instructional leadership is only meant for certain teachers.

There may be teachers who don't want or need any of that, and you could get that reading from them, whereas others would be all about it. It would be possible to focus your time and energy there. You don't have to short change; I don't see why you have to put as much into each person. You could change that based on the teacher you are interacting with.

Madison was very detailed and descriptive with her answer.

Well, I, you know, it's interesting because, remember my perspective now, I see my principal coddling people a lot and I've called him out on it a few times...I think that um, you know, there are just things that have to be done. You know, the whole thing with the Common Core and you know, you've gotta do what you've gotta do. So, but I kind of a suck it up and deal kind of person, and I think that people are either going to be, people are either going to be, kind of generally positive or they're generally gonna be leaning toward being negative. People who are generally speaking negative

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

people, we don't have than many of them in my school, you're not ever gonna make them happy. So I don't know, I think that you waste a lot of time trying to make them happy. I think that you need to set the standard and they're just gonna have to suck it up and deal.

Next, Madison talked about teachers who are usually positive but for some reason are being negative about certain things.

And then the people who maybe are kind of usually positive people, and for some reason you are getting resistance from them, I think that maybe they just don't understand or see the big picture. Or maybe it hasn't been explained well enough, or if it has to do with technology, they are afraid of the technology or they don't understand the technology. I think that sometimes having someone, having lots of go to people, and that's what we try to do in our school, is we very informally have lots of go to people who if when someone comes...there are five or six people who are all very different and all have very different personalities and you can pick the one you like the best to go to and they will be able to help you. And that way there you have, you have a real backing of support so it will never be an issue no matter what initiative you have at your school.

After once more emphasizing that negative people are going to have to just deal with whatever is in place and noting that "you're just gonna have to ignore them", she recounted another example of her principal's over-consideration of a teacher's feelings.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

He's just a really kind person and I love that about him, but recently he invited some of our student leaders to our leadership, our faculty leadership meeting, and it was a leadership team, not just a faculty leadership team. And so he had five or six 8<sup>th</sup> graders come and sit on our leadership team and he was asking me how I felt about it. I had sent two of them coz I run a club, and I had said that it was incredible, I thought it was amazing. It was incredibly, well thought out responses and he said yeah, I'm really surprised I haven't gotten more push back on that from from the teachers. And I said to him, 'I dare them, I dare them to say something.' This is his job right? Sometimes he's just too nice.

### **Question 13.**

*What behaviors would your principal and assistant principal need to demonstrate in order for you to say "My principal is an instructional leader?"*

This question allowed Michaela to reiterate and expand on some of her earlier ideas as well as express some new ones. "I would appreciate having my administrators in my classroom more...um, whenever they do just walk in and then walk out I'm like, I don't know, I wanna know what they're thinking. I wanna know what am I doing well or what am I am not doing well." Speaking of the evaluation process once again, she noted that "when evaluation time comes, like, huh, I don't get that, I wish I would've known so I could be more toward advancing that. Um, I think it's especially difficult for teachers who are only observed once a year and only have one opportunity." Explaining further she said, "It's like giving the students assessments at the end of the year but never doing, you know, not doing

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

any benchmark testing to see okay, here's where they're doing well, here's where they can make, you know, improvements and provide better instruction. For some teachers, that's all they're getting; they're getting just the EOG at the end of the year, but they never got anything throughout the year. You know, how they can improve or what they're doing well.

Jacqueline began by saying "I think for starters I'd want to feel as though they took notice of what I was doing in my room and were able to say 'hey I like that' or 'hey where'd you get that idea?'" and start setting the stage for conversation." She also suggested that norms should be set so at meetings teachers do more than talk "about bathroom procedures" and "more time and energy when we do meet as a group are gauged toward let's talk about instruction and best practices and that kind of thing and less about, you know, planning a parent night and dividing the kids up into 700 groups or whatever activity it is we need to do next." Then she elaborated more.

You have a lot of opportunity to become that leader that maybe people were wanting instead of the person that is giving out information and organizing the activity and being a liaison to the outside world and the teachers. The time would need to be taken and they would need to take time to say, not necessarily verbally, but through their actions 'I care about what you're doing in your room, I wanna know what you're doing in your room, and I want to talk about what we're all doing in our rooms so that we can work together to create better instructional practices.

This notion was important to her. She wants her administrators to "take a mental note of

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

what I'm doing" and think "less about all the craziness of being an administrator and thought more about instruction and teaching and students and learning." However, she is not convinced that these behaviors should be done routinely. "It's not something I would suggest an administrator do on a regular basis, but even if you just picked a moment in time you know where something that was just genuine and really stuck with them. Things like that go a long way." Then she elaborated.

Especially in the business of teaching, if someone takes the time to say something real pleasant to you or really elicit a concern or or being impressed or whatever the emotion is; obviously don't tell us we're horrible coz that doesn't help. You know when someone takes the time to do something or say something or write something that goes a long way for teachers coz we know how little time everybody has within a school setting. I feel like I've repeated myself a lot. I've been a lot into communication, setting a clear foundation, and being straightforward, and you have good intentions and I can't really emphasize that enough. You know, if teachers, if we feel there's good intentions and I feel like this isn't some like secret spying maneuver, you know, and you hate to say it out loud but you just never know any more, you know. If you feel like there's genuine intention there, I I don't see how that can go in a negative way. Even if you didn't want it. If you knew they were genuine and you didn't want it you could still politely deal with that without anyone feeling their ego getting hurt.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Madison indicated that she did not want to answer this question because she felt that she already answered it.

### **Summary**

In this chapter the data and the results were presented. The results were exhibited and specified individually for Part1 and Part 2 of the survey as well as for the interviews. In Chapter 5, the results will be summarized into themes and main ideas, discussed in detail, and recommendations for practice and further research will be shared. In addition, this study will be discussed in relation to studies that have been conducted previously and reviewed in Chapter 2.

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

This chapter first summarizes and reviews the study purpose and procedures, and then discussed in relation to the studies from the literature review. Next the findings and conclusions from the data are presented and discussed. After that implications for middle school principals and recommendations for future research are presented. Finally, the study is summarized.

### Study Purpose

This study explored how middle school teachers perceive instructional leadership and if they perceive it negatively, why those negative perceptions persist. The goal is to provide suggestions to administrators and educational leaders for overcoming teachers' negative perceptions of instructional leadership so school improvement efforts can move forward. Thus, my research questions are *'What perceptions of instructional leadership do middle school teachers possess'* and *'Why do some middle school teachers have negative perceptions of their administrators as instructional leaders'?*

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Study Procedures**

A qualitative study was conducted which involved administering a two-part survey and conducting interviews. The surveys were conducted through eSurveyspro.com.com and the links were sent out initially by email to middle school teachers (1,713) whose main role is working with students in one particular urban county in North Carolina. The email addresses were collected from each school's website. One week later a reminder was again sent out to the email addresses. The survey was open for two weeks.

Part 1 included eight questions about instructional leadership, which were 'yes'/'no' questions and included space for comments, and 10 demographic questions. They were utilized to answer both of my research questions, and the written comments helped to support my conclusions as well. The first eight questions were also employed to obtain the pool of interview candidates. The Part 1 surveys with the most number of 'no' responses or a 'no' response on certain questions were separated out. Twenty one surveys qualified the responding teacher to be interviewed. If a teacher listed their contact information and agreed to participate in the interview, he or she was contacted. Four respondents agreed to be interviewed and were initially contacted, and three set up an interview time and were interviewed.

Part 2 included 56 multiple choice questions from eleven different subcategories of instructional leadership behaviors. All of the responses were tallied and an average for each response within each subscale was calculated to find out if positive or negative answer

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

choices were selected most often in each subscale. Next the average answer for the eleven subscales was tabulated and then averaged to determine which subscales are perceived to be performed the most and the least often. Part 2 questions assisted me in answering my first research question.

The thirteen-question interview dug deeper into the teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership and the reasons for them. They were valuable in answering both of my research questions.

### **Discussion**

It is my hope that the current study will be useful to district and school administrators as well as to teachers as they work to bring about student learning and success and strengthen their own practices. Even though there have been numerous studies on instructional leadership and teacher perceptions in the past, as shown by the literature review, this study not only supports the conclusions of many of the previous studies, which serves to make them stronger, but also contributes something new to this knowledge base and will hopefully be the catalyst for further study which will add even more.

When multiple studies arrive at the same conclusions, these conclusions are rendered more valid and important. Research is the most impactful, useful, and influential when this is the case. My study supports the claims and findings of many of the studies I reviewed in Chapter 2.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Overall, my data revealed many of the same instructional leadership behaviors which are important to teachers as previous studies I cited, such as visibility, regular communication, assisting with parent and student difficulties, responding to teacher concerns and needs, providing frequent and genuine praise and feedback, involving the teachers in decision making, and providing the supports that teachers need to implement changes. I concluded that teachers expect a great deal of support from their administrators while understanding that they have numerous responsibilities and that teachers' perceptions are closely tied to the leadership behaviors of their principal and school norms and policies, which echoes some of the findings of Manders (2009), Jantzi and Leithwood (1996), Corbett et. al. (1987), and Pulleyn (2012). My data also confirms the findings of McCoy and Holt (2012), Castellon (2007), and Knight (2000); a sense of teamwork is crucial to fostering positive perceptions of instructional leadership in teachers.

Castellon's and Knight's data, as well as data from a study produced by Hjelle (2001), found that teachers rebelled against mandated programs or professional development, thus impacting their effectiveness, which my data also substantiates. And like Meyer and VanHoose (1981), I concluded that administrators need to understand teachers' perceptions if change efforts are to be successful. Furthermore, as far as perceptions go, my study as well as studies by Collins (2008), Meyer and VanHoose (1981), and Hoerr (2005), sustain the inference that administrators need to be aware of teacher perceptions and utilize that awareness as they make decisions. Another finding that this study has in common with

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Meyer and VanHoose's study is that teachers expect their administrators to communicate frequently with them and be responsive to their needs and questions.

My data was similar to Kaster's (2010) because we both found that micromanaging teacher behaviors and time is not viewed positively by teachers. Several of the previously conducted studies I read employed the PIMRS as well, such as the study created by Dennis (2009), in which some of the most frequently displayed behaviors are those that were found in my study also. My study also mirrored the research done by Coffin (2008) because the data indicated that teachers do not believe that instructional leadership should be the primary role of a principal.

Instructional leadership of assistant principals was important to this study, and the data revealed some similarities with some of the studies I read for my literature review. The study conducted by Harllee (1988) implied that assistant principals have instructional leadership responsibilities, which this study supports, although to a lesser extent. Interestingly, my data signified that other school staff members can and should be able to take on instructional leadership responsibilities, to not only help out the principal but to support teachers better, and that some of the teachers feel their assistant principal is the instructional leader in the school instead of the principal. This supports the findings of Zeitoun and Newton (2002).

Teacher resistance was discussed at length in Chapter 2 because it often accompanies negative perceptions, and like Knight (2009), this study gives some suggestions for avoiding

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

it and making it easier and more desirable for teachers to comply with fidelity. Berkovich (2011) stated that teacher perceptions affect the success of decisions and reforms, which can also be presumed from my data. As Zimmerman (2006) recommended, it is important for principals to reflect on their leadership behaviors, taking into account the perceptions of the teachers they lead, and make adjustments as necessary to increase teacher efficacy, buy-in to reforms, and effectiveness. A part of this entails viewing negative teachers as positively as possible and seeking solutions to the negativity and resistance, which is a theme of this study and was inferred by Hjelle (2001).

Despite the similarities with previous research, several factors contribute to the uniqueness of this study and its ability to enhance our current knowledge of teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership and the reasons behind these perceptions. First, this study not only gave ideas for facilitating the change process in schools, but it also touched upon how to transform teachers' perceptions in order to continue positive change processes and make them successful. The study conducted by Aistrup (2010) led to the creation of a guidebook of specific actions administrators could take to improve their instructional leadership abilities, but did not address altering teacher behaviors. Second, this study utilized multiple choice and open ended surveys as well as interviews to gather data. Many of the studies I reviewed, such as the Manders (2009) study, gathered only one type of data. Manders used only open-ended/short answer questions.

The data from this study allowed me to make some different conclusions than many

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

previous studies. This is important because discrepancies such as this lead to better and deeper understanding and newer and often better studies. Unlike Pulleyn (2012) and Roberts Brailsford (2001), the data in the current study shows that the younger teachers had less positive perceptions of instructional leadership behaviors and their administrators as instructional leaders than the older teachers did. Even though Giannangelo and Malone's (1987) study found that most of the teachers felt that instructional leadership is the most important role of a principal, I found the exact opposite. In addition, their study alluded to the fact that teachers felt that administrators are too concerned with duties other than those related to academics, while my data indicated that teachers feel there should be more of a balance between academic and other responsibilities.

Barnett and McCormick (2004) found that the views of other teachers do not influence a teacher's perceptions of a principal, but the current study found that the teachers rely heavily on and give great credence to the opinions and experiences of their colleagues. Roberts Brailsford's 2001 study examined middle school teachers' perceptions of effective instructional leadership characteristics as a whole and in their principals, and found that a teacher's level of education and school size had the most influence over the teachers' perceptions while age and gender had little influence on perceptions. Overall, she concluded that teacher characteristics are highly influential on perceptions. In this study I didn't feel that education was a factor, but I did believe that age was, and my data indicated that teacher perceptions are strongly related to the school environment and leadership.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Regarding assistant principals, this study not only added the perceptions of teachers about assistant principals as instructional leaders, but it also contradicts previous studies, such as those conducted by Wells et. al. (1999), Kaplan and Owings (1999), Anderson (1987), Lindley (1998), and Celikten (2001), which showed that assistant principals are not seen as instructional leaders and do not have instructional leadership responsibilities. Several of my participants indicated exactly the opposite and plainly stated that they view their assistant principals as instructional leaders, some more so than the principal.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Survey part 1.**

Of the 59 middle school teachers who took part in this study, many of them identify their principal and assistant principal as instructional leaders and also believe that they *should be* instructional leaders. However, it is also important to note that there was not a huge difference between the responses, so the teachers were almost evenly divided regarding these questions. Moreover, a majority of the 59 participants answered questions one and two the same way and feel the same about their principal and assistant principal regarding being an instructional leader, whether that was in the affirmative or the negative.

Furthermore, almost the same number of participants who don't see their principal as an instructional leader also don't see their assistant principal as an instructional leader. Once again, this is contradictory to several of the studies I reviewed in Chapter 2, which found that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

assistant principals were not viewed as instructional leaders; principals are the instructional leaders instead. Additionally, almost all of the teachers in this study feel that instructional leadership includes giving teachers suggestions on how to teach, and a large portion of them have asked an administrator for instructional assistance and then actually utilized that assistance. However, a number of them did not view instructional leadership as an administrator's main role and indicated that they would not refer a colleague to an administrator for instructional help or advice.

Teachers who have fewer than seven years of teaching experience and who have been at their current school for less than seven years were more likely to say that their principal and/or assistant principal is not an instructional leader. This finding actually contradicts the results of several other studies which have examined instructional leadership. In addition, these teachers were less likely to have National Board Certification, but referred to themselves as teacher leaders and noted that they either presently hold or have held at least two leadership roles. Neither educational degree or teaching assignment were important factors in this study as a majority of the participants have a Master's degree and represent every subject area and specialty.

The study's participants were mostly Caucasian women between the ages of 20 and 30. Generally, they have been teaching for less than 17.5 years and have been at their current school for fewer than eight years. Specifically, teachers with one half to four years experience and who have been at their school for two years or less were the most likely to

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

participate. The majority of the teacher participants is not National Board Certified Teachers and has earned at least two certifications. Almost all of the teachers indicated that they have or have held at least two leadership roles, however, many were positions that I would not consider true leadership positions because they were voluntary or involved teaching or supervising students.

The data from survey Part I indicate that the middle school teachers from this county have varied but well-defined and somewhat contradictory perceptions of instructional leadership.

### **Survey part 2.**

Most commonly, the teachers indicated that their principals perform the actions in each of the eleven subscales 'sometimes', 'frequently', and 'almost always'. 'Frequently' was the most universal answer across all subscales, indicating that the responses hovered around the mean. Individually, the areas of Promoting Professional Development, Developing and Enforcing Academic Standards, and Framing School Goals were judged to be performed the most often. On the flipside, Maintaining High Visibility, Monitoring Student Progress, and Providing Incentives for Teachers were judged to be performed least regularly. The spread of the average number of participants choosing each of the five Likert Scale responses for Maintaining High Visibility was low, indicating that there is a definite lack of consistency regarding principal visibility across schools.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Interviews.**

The participants described many actions and behaviors which they feel depict and define instructional leadership. Looking at and utilizing data is essential, as well as the ability to lead teachers in creating goals, developing a plan to realize the goals, and then carrying out the plans. As was apparent in the survey, being visible in the classroom and giving positive, constructive, and genuine feedback and instructional advice were important too. The teachers also felt that being available for questions and making sure that teaching and instruction are the main focus characterize instructional leadership.

The teachers were asked to predict if their principal, assistant principal(s), and other teachers would have the same views of instructional leadership that they do. All three teachers felt that their principal and assistant principal would feel the same as they do, whether that was negative or positive. For example, Jacqueline noted that instructional leadership doesn't seem to be important to her principal and he does not talk about instruction or focus on it through conversation and writing very much. This is contrary to her desires. Madison stated that she has not seen her principal engaged in instructional leadership actions with other teachers, leaving her to question whether he places importance on instructional leadership activities. When mentioning the assistant principals, Jacqueline declared that they have so many other things to do so they don't focus on instructional conversations such as giving feedback and focusing on teaching. In addition, she feels that they are not models for instruction and don't have instructional conversations with teachers.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Madison replied that two of her assistant principals have given her a lot of instructional support so they would have similar views to hers.

On the topic of teachers having the same views of instructional leadership as they do, the two interviewees who answered the question were once again divided. Michaela was adamant that the teachers in her school wouldn't because they are not purposefully collecting or using data. Jacqueline sees things differently, and feels that since the teachers are comfortable with sharing instructional ideas with each other, they have positive views of instructional leadership. Madison refused to answer the question.

There was a wide range of reasons why the three teachers who were interviewed believe that administrators should be instructional leaders. Just like in some of the other questions, they suppose that support through visibility, helping teachers, and developing a shared vision, goals, and a mission are necessary. Furthermore, the actions working collaboratively with the staff, overseeing meetings, setting best practices, having open and frequent communication, and making sure teachers and instructional time are valued were shared. Two unique answers were that someone needs to be the instructional leader so it might as well be the principal and that principals are probably good teachers so they want to become administrators to share their expertise with others.

Not surprisingly given their previous answers, the interviewees either felt that their principal is not an instructional leader or is not performing that role well. Each recounted examples of ways their principal is not an instructional leader, such as trust is lacking and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

communication isn't two-way, but also expressed that they have the potential to be an instructional leader or to be better at it. Madison felt that the assistant principals in her school are better at instructional leadership and actually perform instructional leadership roles more often than the principal.

On the topic of guessing if fellow teachers would feel the same way about their principal as an instructional leader, the answers from two of the respondents were the same but the reasons varied. The third did not want to answer the question. Michaela believes that the teachers would not feel the same way as her because their meetings are not instructional in nature and are not productive. She also stated that there are too many meaningless meetings so their time is not spent on supporting the students the way they should be, and the teachers would feel differently because they are overworked and also noted the lack of data-driven decision making. Jacqueline was not sure that the teachers at her school actually want their administrators to be instructional leaders. She thought that they might not see the principal as someone who was a good teacher and might believe that the principal is out of touch with what goes on in the classroom.

The respondents were also asked what they see as the most important role of an administrator. Each of the participants answered based on their own personal experiences, and felt that overall an administrator needs to be a leader and there are different ways to fulfill that. For example, Jacqueline relayed that administrators need to understand that the purpose of schooling is for the students to learn, and must work to ensure that purpose is

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

fulfilled as well as complete all of the other tasks that are expected of an administrator such as discipline and setting procedures. Madison specifically supposed that instructional leadership is not the main role because there might be other people who can execute that role. She thinks that principals can be more operations oriented and focus on the bigger picture instead of concentrating solely on instructional leadership.

When asked if they feel if other teachers would feel the same way about what the most important role of an administrator is, the two participants who chose to answer the question answered affirmatively. They asserted that teachers want to get feedback and want to know if they are doing a good job because they want to improve. Michaela also hypothesized that teachers would need to respect the person the advice is coming from. Jacqueline thought that as teachers become more experienced and are at a school longer they begin to adapt their perceptions to align with how things are done at the school. Thus, she assumed that there are differences in perceptions between newer and more experienced teachers.

The participants were asked if they think there are teachers who believe that administrators should not be instructional leaders. Both of the interviewees who answered this question sensed that most teachers would like their administrators to be instructional leaders because they want feedback and help. However, the teacher's experiences and the subject(s) they teach will guide their expectations of their administrators.

Next, the three teacher participants were asked if they feel that instructional

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

leadership usurps a teacher's control in the classroom. Two of them answered 'no' and the other answered 'both'. Jacqueline answered in the negative because her administrators aren't really involved with instruction that much. Madison reflected on her own experiences again and based her answer only on what she's observed. She was adamant in saying that she wants to get help and ideas. So she actively seeks out advice and assistance and doesn't feel like that infringes on her control or expertise in the classroom. Michaela stated that it depends on how the individual teacher reacts to feedback or suggestions and what type of person he or she is.

There were only a few instructional leadership actions suggested by the participants which might be perceived negatively by teachers. The first was the evaluation process because sometimes it is not presented in a fair, helpful, and meaningful manner. The second was administrative feedback on teaching and instruction because some teachers may not trust that the administrator knows what he/she is talking about or that the feedback is genuine and meaningful. The last entails occasions when feedback is not given or shared and the teacher is left wondering and worrying about what the administrator thinks.

Each teacher was asked to detail a time when an instructional decision was perceived positively by teachers and a time when an instructional decision was perceived negatively. Amazingly, given some of their responses, they had a hard time coming up with negatives. Positively viewed decisions include when the administration supports teachers or speaks up for them with parents, when there is good communication, and when there is follow through

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

with initiatives. A negatively viewed decision was the mandated use of a reading strategy that was not monitored well and forced on all teachers regardless of their subject area and student population.

The participants were able to give many suggestions of things that administrators can do to change teacher perceptions about instructional leadership. Echoing earlier sentiments, communicating intentions and policies honestly and continuously, providing genuine and positive feedback which is specific, and building relationships was shared. In addition, seeking to build the teachers' confidence, letting teachers know about previous teaching experience, and remembering that change takes time were also stated. It was also theorized that principals should ignore the negative teachers and instead focus their time and effort on the positive ones.

Similar to the previous question, the last question in the interview asked the participants to list behaviors that their administrator would need to do in order to be considered an instructional leader. The participants would like for their administrators to be in the classrooms more and communicate with the teachers frequently afterwards about what they noticed, repeatedly let the teachers know that they appreciate them and what they're doing, and make meetings meaningful and devoted mainly to instruction and instructional practices. They also were clear that they want their administrators to create opportunities for teachers to share best practices and what's going on in their classroom with other teachers and to have good intentions behind whatever initiatives they put into place. Most

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

interestingly, Jacqueline expects her administrators to focus on all types of leadership rather than just one because an administrator's job is complicated and there is a lot to do and take care of. She thinks that no aspect or responsibility of being a principal should be left out or forsaken.

The interviews yielded a great deal of data and facilitated insight into middle school teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership. Communication, visibility, providing helpful, encouraging, and timely feedback, and being genuine permeated almost every reply in some way. It is clear that teachers have very defined perceptions of instructional leadership and instructional leaders that are created and sustained by their experiences and can be negative, so administrators need to be aware of this and devise specific plans to try and turn them around so school change and improvement efforts can be successful.

### **Conclusions**

Through this study I was able to answer my research questions and craft some interesting conclusions. Furthermore, when compared with Marshall's similar 2005 study which also explored middle school teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership, some new and unique conclusions can be drawn.

Marshall's study was similar to this study because it utilized the PIMRS created by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and sought to find out middle school teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership, but Marshall kept the questionnaire as is whereas I made some slight

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

modifications in wording to a few of the questions and only used 56 of the questions instead of all 71. In addition, Marshall (2005) utilized the PIMRS to identify instructional leadership behaviors that are “perceived to be important for an effective instructional leader to practice” (p. 105). In the current study, teachers rated their principal on how often the instructional leadership behaviors in the survey were performed, which is how Hallinger and Murphy (1985) used the PIMRS as well. Marshall’s study was quantitative so she didn’t collect survey data, and therefore didn’t triangulate her results. Thus, the outcomes of this study are significantly different from those in Marshall’s study and add something new to the current knowledge base about instructional leadership.

*What perceptions of instructional leadership do middle school teachers possess?*

My first research question sought to discover the perceptions that middle school teachers have of instructional leadership so administrators and school district leaders can more effectively lead, train teachers, and prepare a thriving learning environment for students. As is the case with most issues where people’s perceptions come into play, this study showed that there are many different perceptions of instructional leadership and its importance, and that these perceptions may be caused and influenced by countless factors.

Surprisingly, the teachers in this study were almost evenly divided when it came to observing their administrators as instructional leaders. As the data demonstrates, a likely reason for this is that ideas of instructional leadership come from experiences. The participants in this study relied on their own experiences to respond to the questions, which

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

have caused them to have certain perceptions. It is clear that these perceptions have been formed by the leadership they have witnessed and been subjected to by their principals and assistant principals, the policies and procedures they have had to adhere to, and their discussions with colleagues.

Newer and/or younger teachers, as well as teachers who have been at their current school for fewer than seven years, were more likely to feel that their principal and/or assistant principal is not an instructional leader. This finding contradicts the findings of several previous studies. Although notable, this fact can be the result of many different factors such as lack of understanding about instructional leadership, lack of understanding about leadership in general, resistance to and/or fear of new things, exposure to other teachers with negative perceptions, or feelings of overconfidence. However, it is worth keeping in mind and reacting to since many schools have a large number of new teachers so they can have an impact on the school culture.

Education did not seem to have an impact on the teachers' views in this study, since a majority holds a Master's degree, which is more common now than it has been in the past. Many new graduates of teacher education programs go right on to a Master's degree program to be competitive in today's harsh and competitive job market. However, only a small number of the participants have earned or are in the process of earning National Board Certification. Unfortunately there is no way to assess why, as there are dozens of reasons why more National Board Certified teachers didn't prefer to participate, but it is clear that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

having this certification may influence a teacher's views of instructional leadership. Earning National Board Certification is a lengthy and involved process which requires the teachers to have, document, and reflect on leadership roles within and outside of the school. This can facilitate greater understanding of leadership in general, which in turn may translate into different attitudes and a higher appreciation of it.

The number of leadership roles was not a factor in determining the teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership either. This was a surprise, as being a teacher leader usually allows the teacher to gain insight into how the school is run, the actions school leaders must take, and how administrators perceive things on a large scale, which will perpetuate a change in the teacher's perceptions. However, there was a distinct disconnect between the teachers' definition of leadership roles and mine which could have impacted the data and the interpretation of it. But that could be related to the fact that many of these roles are not those that have the teachers interacting with the principal very much or have a great impact on school decisions or initiatives. Thus, perceptions of instructional leadership are not influenced or affected.

Generally, the teachers who participated in this study believe that their principals should be instructional leaders, whether they are currently or not, but do not agree that this should be the main role of an administrator. It is apparent that many of the respondents believe that instructional leadership has its limitations and should be applied only with certain teachers or in certain situations. It seemed as though some of the participants see

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

instructional leadership as a strategy or intervention rather than a method of leading, and there is a resistance to it if they feel that they are good teachers and are doing their best and what they are expected to do. But overall, the teachers seemed to realize and acknowledge that administrators have a wide range of responsibilities and that there are different kinds of leadership skills that are necessary to execute each one. However, this was based mostly on their own experiences and administrators' ways of doing things. Thus, a principal's leadership has a profound effect on a teacher's perceptions.

Intriguingly, though the teachers in the study stated that they were likely to ask an administrator for instructional support, assistance, and ideas, they were not as inclined to then use the ideas, and were even less likely to refer other teachers to an administrator for instructional advice. Quite a few of them stated that they would rather refer a colleague to another colleague. This may have to do with past experiences with how evaluations were conducted or how past feedback was presented, or with perceptions of the administrator as an instructional expert. In addition, middle school teachers are known to view themselves as experts in their subject area, so they would want to refer another teacher to an expert.

Specific perceptions of instructional leadership came mainly from the comments participants opted to write on survey Part 1 and the interviews. They can be broken into two basic categories; actions that principals should be sure to take and actions that should be avoided. A key perception is that trusting relationships and communication are important; administrators who build and sustain open, honest, collegial, and collaborative relationships

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

with both students and teachers are more likely to be viewed as instructional leaders.

Visibility was noted as well, in addition to guiding teachers in creating, implementing, and monitoring instructional goals to ensure student success. Several comments were made which indicate that principals who utilize data to make decisions and share useful data routinely, ensure that teachers have access to necessary tools and training via ongoing and significant staff development, and give teachers time and freedom when implementing new initiatives are more likely to be seen as instructional leaders and will face less resistance.

It was also plainly communicated that principals who give genuine and meaningful feedback to teachers about what they are doing well and what they need to improve and who actively support teachers will be considered instructional leaders. Positivity also was imperative; the teachers indicated that only hearing what is wrong or needs to be improved is not well-accepted and will most likely be opposed and ignored. Almost as important is getting teachers involved in decision making and school improvement planning. Incredibly, protecting teachers from overzealous and upset parents was mentioned as well as an instructional leadership action. I presume that this comes from the need to feel supported and the belief that administrators should deal with parents.

Perceptions were strong regarding actions which administrators should abandon or work to alter. Generally, the teachers seemed to resent administrator actions which pull the focus away from instruction and the students and when administrators don't keep instructional practices at the forefront of meetings and decisions. Directives such as

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

attending meetings, which may not be focused on instruction and thus are viewed as unnecessary, and completing large amounts of paperwork were associated with poor instructional leadership as well by the teacher participants. Teachers think that they should be protected from certain obligations and duties.

Evaluations were mentioned many times as well; they need to be meaningful, beneficial, positive, and based on multiple observations and types of data. Many of the teachers do not view their administrators as competent instructionally; they believe that administrators can't give them suggestions because they don't understand their curriculum or best practices. It was a common view that there are other staff members in the school who are capable of being the instructional leaders and mandates from the central or district office can interfere with perceptions of the administrator as a leader of instructional practices rather than an implementer of them.

Furthermore, some participants felt that when principals don't adhere to the same expectations as teachers are expected to follow they will be less likely to be able to lead instructionally. Though not stated explicitly, there was unquestionably a notion that principals who leave the instructional leadership responsibilities to others will ultimately impede their own ability to be an instructional leader as well. In addition, a number of participants stated that instructional leadership can have an impact on the initiative and work ethic of teachers; the slightly veiled message being that teachers will work and try harder when they sense that they are being well- guided instructionally. Administrators should keep

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

in mind that it's important to know who each of their teachers is as a person and an educator and should not force teachers to change how they teach or mandate them to implement certain strategies that might not fit in with the subject(s) they teach or the students in their class.

One impression I found intriguing was that negative teachers should be ignored and instead time should be spent supporting, working with, and training those who are receptive. Though this can be accomplished to a point, administrators cannot utterly ignore certain teachers or refuse to facilitate their personal and professional growth. There are some decisions that must be made because they are best for students, even though they may be uncomfortable or a hardship for teachers, so they will be made and enacted no matter how teachers feel about them.

Basically, the perceptions that teachers have about instructional leadership vary and are often influenced by the teacher's number of years of teaching experience, age, number of years at their current school, views of the competence of their administrators, other teachers' perceptions, and the direct interactions they have with their principals. However, taken as a whole, these perceptions were not as negative as I expected or have experienced, and lead me to believe that perceptions of instructional leadership are dependent predominantly upon who the specific school leaders are and the culture, climate, norms, and policies of each school. Teachers that look upon instructional leadership in a negative way have very specific and often deep rooted reasons for this, which might be difficult to change for a wide array of

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

reasons.

*Why do some middle school teachers have negative perceptions of their administrators as instructional leaders?*

Not unexpectedly, the answers to this question overlap with the answers to the first one as the two questions are profoundly linked. The perceptions that the participants have also give us clues as to why they have them. There will be a great deal of repetition, but for me as a researcher that signifies the importance of what's repeated.

Even though most of the participants think that their administrators should be instructional leaders, it was apparent from the open ended responses and interviews that they do not have a great deal of confidence in their instructional and curricular knowledge. Some of the teachers believe that their administrators are too far removed teaching to be able to provide instructional assistance and resist accepting it from them. This comes from several sources, such as the feeling that principals are only following mandates of central office, which teachers feel is not leading, as well as the fact that new initiatives and mandates are not always applicable to all teachers and subject areas. Furthermore, teachers often think that instructional leadership entails the principal using the observation and evaluation process to tell them what to do and how they should run their classroom, which can lead to resentment, the idea that the principal's recommendations are incorrect, and noncompliance. The instructional leader uses the evaluation tool to help teachers become better at their craft, but unfortunately, some teachers may not recognize or appreciate this.

Lack of visibility, in various forms, was also suggested as a major reason for

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

teachers' negative perceptions of instructional leadership. Some of the interviewees stated that teachers want their administrators to be present in meetings to give support as well as to be available to answer questions, and would like administrators to spend time in the classrooms more often and provide helpful and immediate or timely feedback to them on how they are performing and if their lessons brought about student learning. Instructional leadership necessitates that principals come out of their office and spend more time amongst the teachers and students where the instruction takes place.

From the data in this study, it can also be concluded that some middle school teachers view instructional leadership as an intervention or strategy for teachers who are struggling or who are receiving lower ratings on the evaluation tool rather than a process and approach for bringing about student achievement and whole school improvement. This may be caused by a general misunderstanding of the goals and mission of instructional leadership; providing for teacher growth is a major part of it. The way in which feedback, ideas, or suggestions are presented can greatly affect this. It is also clear that the teachers viewed giving feedback and suggestions as a prominent and dominant responsibility of an instructional leader, but at the same time feel that there are staff members other than the principal who should have this role. Several participants know that principals have many other roles, such as community and parent relations and discipline, which are just as important as instructional leadership, and don't feel that these roles should be ignored.

Communication was a main theme of the interviews and permeates all feelings,

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

whether negative or positive about instructional leadership. The teacher participants expressed that teachers are more negative about and resistant to instructional leadership when they feel that their administrators do not communicate with them or are not communicating genuinely. The main idea is that teachers want to feel valued and appreciated, so when they don't, they can begin to feel negatively about the administrator(s) and the school.

In general, a few of the participants indicated that when the principal does not sustain a culture centered and focused on instruction, where best practices, teaching, and learning are discussed on a daily basis, negative perceptions can develop. They relayed that most teachers want to discuss instructional practices, share with each other, and learn new strategies, so when this is not the general practice they can feel that the principal is focused on other things. One teacher even recounted that this can affect a teacher's work ethic and attitude.

In her interview, Madison bluntly stated that teachers can have negative perceptions of instructional leadership because they are just negative people and will more than likely stay that way no matter what. The other two participants hinted at this as well throughout their interview, but more subtly, and indicated reasons why this negativity can persist, such as due to not receiving positive or helpful feedback on an evaluation or observation, having questions go unanswered or answered unsatisfactorily, or frustration over the number and/or quality of meetings.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Summary.**

It is evident from the data that this study has uncovered numerous perceptions that middle school teachers have about instructional leadership and reasons for these perceptions to persist. Common perceptions of what instructional leadership is and what it entails include being visible, providing genuine, regular, and meaningful feedback, keeping instruction as a daily focus, and involving teachers in planning and decision making. Possible explanations for negative perceptions regarding instructional leadership actions are lack of communication, mandates, lack of understanding of instructional leadership, and lack of principal visibility.

### **Implications and Suggestions for Practice**

This data from this study revealed some remarkable trends or themes which allowed me to make some specific conclusions and recommendations to principals, especially in middle schools, and other school or district leaders. There are some actions that principals can take to mitigate the effects of negative perceptions of instructional leadership and assist them in creating a more cohesive, collaborative, and collegial school culture and climate that is learning and teaching centered and successful at helping students learn.

Survey Part 1 data indicated that there are particular areas of instructional leadership which are perceived by teachers to be performed frequently by their administrators and areas that are not. Taking note of and seeking to perform these actions can have an effect on

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

teacher perceptions and an administrator's ability to be an instructional leader. Areas which were perceived to be performed most frequently were Promoting Professional Development, Developing and Enforcing Academic Standards, and Framing School Goals. Within Framing School Goals, the participants felt most strongly that their principals utilize student academic performance data to create school goals and clarify teacher responsibilities in achieving academic goals. Actions within Promoting Professional Development which were viewed as performed most frequently were making sure that teachers are aware of staff development opportunities and considering teacher requests for professional development. Within Developing and Enforcing Academic Standards, setting and communicating high standards for all students and setting standards for utilizing all available time for instruction were rated most positively.

The areas that were rated as being performed the least habitually are Maintaining High Visibility, Monitoring Student Progress, and Providing Incentives for Teachers. Administrators should take an assessment of their own performance in these areas and make adjustments if necessary. In the area of Monitoring Student Progress, meeting individually with teachers to discuss student academic progress and discussing item analysis of tests with teachers to identify strengths and weakness in instruction were perceived as being performed the least often. Regarding Maintaining High Visibility, the actions covering classes when needed and tutoring or providing instruction or assistance to students were thought of as being performed rarely. Within the area of Providing Incentives for Teachers,

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

complimenting teachers privately for their efforts or performance and recognizing superior instructional performance by teachers publicly were actions that the participants feel were performed the least.

Communication was one theme that permeated almost every teacher response. It is important for administrators to communicate with their teachers regularly, honestly, and openly. But even more importantly, fostering two-way communication between the teachers and administrators should be a priority. Teachers build their perceptions around their own experiences and conversations with other teachers, and then use this information to compare their present administrators with past administrators. Communicating with teachers and asking for their input in various ways, such as through surveys, face-to-face conversations, and involving them in meetings, to find out what they value in a school leader can help administrators lead in a way that will be more receptive to more teachers on the staff.

Since several of the teachers in this study deemed their administrators to be too far removed from teaching and thus unknowledgeable about instructional practices, it is important for principals and assistant principals to work diligently to ensure that their teachers see them as instructionally astute and capable. This can be done by being visible in classrooms (making an appearance in every teacher's classroom at least 3 times a week so the visits are noticed and remembered) and then providing feedback to the teacher about what was observed either through a hand written note/walkthrough form, conversation, or email. Attending as many teacher meetings as possible so questions can be answered and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

suggestions can be given, and sharing personal experiences and ideas from when the administrator was a teacher can be impactful as well. Being present at all staff development workshops so teachers see that administrators have the same information they do will also be helpful. In addition, getting to know the teachers well and building relationships, both personally and professionally, will help teachers have more confidence in advice given because there is loyalty, trust, and mutual respect in the relationship.

Giannangelo (1987) found similar results; principals need to be visible within the school and give teachers instructional feedback often. Greenfield (1985) also supports the conclusion that visibility is key in defining teachers' perceptions of their principal as an instructional leader and as instructionally competent enough to critique and guide them. Greenfield's study recommends that administrators need to be in the classrooms often for both formal and informal observations of varying length, especially assistant principals if they want to dispel the common notion that they are not or cannot be instructional leaders.

Though there are mandates constantly coming down from superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum heads, and other district or county leaders, it is important to make sure that teachers understand that the actual implementation and monitoring comes from the administration. Discuss how 'we' are going to make this work in the school with teachers and put the emphasis on the actual mandate rather than where it came from. Permit teachers to make a mandate their own and adjust it to fit their own teaching style and the needs of their students. This will help administrators foster the sense that the teachers are

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

trusted and valued as professionals who know how to teach and can make sound instructional decisions. Allowing teachers to think that the only reason a policy or strategy is being put into place is due to a mandate from above makes it possible for them to feel that the administration is losing control or is not capable of leading. Teachers will have more confidence in their leaders if they feel that they are truly leading and not just implementing what others tell them to.

A prevalent impression amongst the teachers in this study is that instructional leadership should take a backseat to other duties and that administrators just don't have time for instructional leadership. Many of them also felt that other staff members, such as assistant principals and instructional resource teachers, can and should be the instructional leaders instead. To dispel this, administrators should bring instruction to the forefront of every meeting and conversation with teachers and set and model best practices. Modeling can be accomplished during staff meetings; teaching techniques can be used and best practices can be shared. In addition, being visible, providing regular feedback on instructional practices, and becoming involved in the instruction that takes place (helping out in classrooms, reading to students, etc.) as well as professional development will be significant. Also, administrators should be careful about complaining to teachers about all of the things they have to do; this will only perpetuate the feeling that there is no time for instructional related issues and that there are other more important things that need to be done.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Unfortunately, many of the teachers in the study feel that instructional leadership is a strategy or initiative that should only be enacted upon teachers who are struggling or when there are observed problems. This goes hand in hand with the idea 'don't fix what isn't broken' expressed by several of them. To combat these notions, administrators can strive to give instructional feedback and ideas during frank two-way discussions, where the observations and advice are presented in a constructive, positive, and caring way. Be open and upfront about feedback procedures with teachers from the very onset of the school year and provide them with copies of the instruments as well. Additionally, give teachers the opportunity to choose between new programs or strategies or a chance to pilot them first before adopting, and permit them to alter new initiatives to suit their needs and teaching style; be less rigid about implementation. This was also recommended by Blasé and Blasé in their 1999 study. When teachers view the ideas as simply ideas rather than directives, they will be more receptive to them. Likewise, when teachers are doing something that is undesired or against policy, administrators should let them know immediately rather than waiting for the evaluation process and present it in an encouraging, constructive, and compassionate way. Meyer and VanHoose (1981) sum these ideas up perfectly; "Change can occur best with proper communication – the middle school principals need to realize they can bring about positive change with positive communication" (p. 73).

Another idea to perpetuate more positive feelings of instructional leadership amongst all teachers was suggested by Larrivee and Cooper (2006). They proposed that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

administrators use a strategy called Critical Incident, which involves sharing a real school problem and solution with teachers which is then discussed and the solutions analyzed.

Teachers can talk about their own thoughts about what could have been done and share their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the decision that was made. To take this one step farther, the problems that are used can be those the school has actually faced. The discussion that ensues can give administrators ideas to solve future similar problems and insight into how their teachers think and process certain information. This strategy requires a very open and trusting school culture, so principals will have to evaluate whether or not it would work in their building or make modifications accordingly.

It was a common feeling among the respondents that staffing has an impact on instructional leadership; if there were more administrators there would be at least one available to devote their time to instructional leadership. However, this is not always possible, so we need to find ways to help teachers feel like instructional leadership is possible with the staff that is on hand. One of the ways administrators can do this is to delegate whenever possible and consciously seek to develop instructional leadership skills in each other. Another idea is to foster leadership in the teachers; give them opportunities to lead committees, share in the decision making, and take leadership training. Scherer (2007) expanded on this concept and suggested that some kind of recognition should be given to teachers who complete teacher leadership courses and implement school reform, improve instruction, coach other teachers, help improve school culture, or do other non-administrative

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

leadership tasks. Rhodes et. al (2009) developed a strategic teacher empowerment intervention that had teachers vote on the most important issues facing the school and then implement them through teacher working groups. The ideas were implemented through plans that were created over a period of months. The researchers' results showed that this process had a positive effect on teacher perceptions.

Also, as Harrison and Killion (2007) suggested, administrators can explore utilizing positions in different ways, such as creating a data specialist or an instructional specialist, or combining positions and have one person serve in two different roles. This can also be done by ascertaining the strengths of teachers and then allowing them to share those strengths with their colleagues. For example, if there are several teachers in a school who are technologically savvy, make sure other teachers are aware of this and know that they can go to any of those teachers when they need support or have questions. When more staff members share the load, there is more time and freedom available for each important task and the quality of implementation and performance can be increased.

Teachers are often reluctant to view the evaluation process as instructional in nature and generally feel that this process does not provide them with adequate instructional support. Some solutions for this are to use frequent walkthroughs to provide teachers with feedback on their teaching in between formal evaluations, always base suggestions and critiques on direct observations, documents, and/or student data rather than on conjecture, thoughts, or information from others, make sure there is a strong mentor and teacher support

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

program, and provide for consistent and ongoing staff development and the sharing of best practices.

Some principals plan for weekly meetings where teachers can share information about lessons, activities, or procedures they use that are successful with students with each other and/or conduct weekly staff development workshops on instructional techniques, curriculum implementation, or current initiatives. Meetings should be meaningful and mainly focused on the school's overarching goal of supporting students in the learning process and ensuring student success. In addition, it's essential to respect teachers as experts and value their hard work and knowledge by employing the evaluation process to enrich, strengthen, and enhance practices rather than change or replace them. Let teachers know openly that they are appreciated and valued, that their time is valued, and that all intentions are good. If teachers feel like they are being told to change how they teach or forced to do certain things differently, they will be less receptive and negative perceptions may develop.

The data in this study revealed that younger and newer teachers, as well as teachers who have not been at a school for at least four years, are less likely to view their administrators as instructional leaders. Whether this reality is grounded in fact or merely a function of the teachers' inexperience and unfamiliarity with the norms, culture, and procedures in the school, administrators should be aware of the experience levels of their teachers and try to use this information to their advantage. Always keep in mind that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

each teacher is different and thus has different needs and processes things differently. In a school where there is a majority of new teachers, the principal should be extra diligent with building leadership capacity, involving teachers in decision-making, presenting instructional feedback positively and regularly, maintaining high visibility within the school, and being open and transparent about processes and procedures relating to instruction.

Roberts Brailsford (2001) and Walker and Slear (2011) found similar results and recommended further that principals take this into account when providing staff development. They propose that principals consciously provide for the varying needs of less and more experienced teachers independently and consider separating them so the presentations can address their often unique concerns and perceptions.

By and large, it is evident from the survey and written responses as well as the interviews in this study that it is critical for administrators to keep in mind that change takes time and many teachers buck against change because they are used to the ways things have always been done. Thus, school administrators must actively seek to recognize why teachers do what they do and think the way they think, and then use that information to their advantage to make the school environment better and reduce the possibility that negativity will become prevalent. Administrators should recognize that teachers' perceptions can be very strong and are often influenced by one another. Pickens (2005) suggested that administrators use attribution theory to facilitate this, which states that people have two behavioral motives; the need to understand their environment and the world around them and

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

the need to simultaneously control their environment to the greatest extent possible.

Thus, people act on the basis of their beliefs, whether or not they are valid, and those beliefs turn into perceptions which are reality for each person. Administrators who comprehend and acknowledge this, and then proactively employ strategies such as those described throughout this section, will be more likely to be able to become instructional leaders and complete instructional leadership actions with more fidelity and buy-in from teachers. In other words, administrators need to be reflective practitioners and continually collect information about their teachers and use that information. Principals can administer personality and/or learning and teaching style tests to their teachers to find out more about them and then analyze that data to inform decisions. Surveys are also powerful; they can help administrators ascertain teachers' perceptions, needs, experiences, and values and can be administered on paper, electronically, or in individual or group conversations.

One of the teachers indicated in her interview that some teachers are just negative and there isn't a lot that can be done about that. This may or may not be the case, but that should not be the attitude of a school leader. Instead, recognizing which teachers are negative while avoiding blaming and getting upset with them is appropriate. Many of the strategies already presented can support the changing of negative perceptions and attitudes, as well as a special approach that is already used with mentors; journal writing. However, rather than the journal being used as a communication tool between two people where one writes their thoughts and opinions and the other responds, the journals are used at staff meetings. Teachers can be

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

given notebooks, a piece of paper, or a sticky note, so they can anonymously write their ideas on how to solve a problem, list things that are going well with a strategy or initiative, or articulate concerns they have that can be addressed. These are collected, closely reviewed by administrators, and then the concerns addressed either at the next meeting or via email within a few days. A variation is to have teachers share and discuss their written suggestions and thoughts with each other in small groups first and then with the group. Someone writes down the suggestions read aloud for the administrators to consider. Regardless of how it's accomplished the focus is the same; providing teachers with a method to communicate with their principal and assistant principal(s).

Lastly, this study revealed instructional leadership actions which are appreciated by and meaningful to teachers and should be part of an instructional leader's leadership style.

1. Utilize data to make instructional decisions and involve teachers in the examination and analysis of the data. Give teachers student data that they can use to make instructional decisions as often as possible and make sure they know how to use it. The data should be in a format that is clear and easy to read and understand. However, while doing this, make sure that teachers are comfortable with utilizing data and know how to do so. Find out what their comfort level is and then provide training and guidance as needed. Sometimes it is better to present data to teachers one-on-one rather than at a so their questions and needs can be addressed immediately.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

2. Create a process and procedure for teachers to support other teachers instructionally. This should be separate from any mentor program that is already in place. In a middle school the team atmosphere is strong, so talk with each team about how to provide instructional support to one another and come up with some actions the teachers will take to do this. Book studies can also be a great strategy for this, as well as sharing instructional videos which teachers can watch and discuss in small groups. This will empower the teachers as well and help them feel more in tune with and apart of the school and decision making procedures.
3. Become familiar with new research-based strategies and varied resources for the curriculum so they can be shared with staff regularly. Use staff meetings and other meetings to share ideas, and make it a practice to give teachers activity and lesson ideas, scholarly articles, and website links in between these meetings.
4. Make professional development a priority and ongoing. Create a plan in the beginning of the year in conjunction with the teachers and help teachers utilize the information presented. Also, attend the presentations so the teachers see that you not only care about the fact that they are learning something new, but you have the same information they have and they can ask you questions if needed. Workshops should be scaffolded and include modeling and opportunities to practice just like lessons and build in intensity as time goes on. Remember to follow up on implementation also, provide teachers with continued time to

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

reflect on what they learned and implement it, and discuss the new learning throughout the year. Teachers must see that the new learning will be revisited and discussed routinely in order for them to put effort into adding it to their teaching practices. Otherwise, the belief that 'this too shall pass' may take over and the training may be pushed aside.

5. Try to create an atmosphere of continuous school improvement. Teachers will be more open to instructional suggestions and making improvements if they are involved in and in agreement with the notion that it's for school improvement and strengthening instructional programs for the students. Utilize the school's improvement plan to include major instructional changes planned and add things that pop up during the year to the plan. Explain why new initiatives or mandates are being implemented and sympathize with teachers' fears or reluctance. Let teachers know that everyone is in this together; that the administration is in it with them and is working to improve as well.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Instructional leadership is an important area of school leadership and even though there are countless studies about it, more research is warranted to provide school leaders with ideas and data-based information. Studies such as this one, which begin to probe into the motivations and perceptions of teachers, need to be conducted more often.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

If this study were conducted again, it should be carried out with a much larger number of participants so the conclusions and findings would be more reliable. This could be done through the solicitation of participants from more than one county or school district, and perhaps even several states. It would be valuable to find out if geographical location or differences in school programming have an impact on teachers' perceptions. Given the importance of instructional leadership and the need for administrators to be involved in the instructional practices that take place in their school, there is a need for continued research in this area. This study only scratched the surface of the reasons why negative perceptions of instructional leadership persist within middle school teachers and the results demonstrate that it is necessary to continue to explore this issue.

The current study found that newer and younger teachers who have not been at their school for a very long time are more likely to have negative views of instructional leadership and their administrator(s) as an instructional leader. This finding disagrees with some of the previous studies discussed in Chapter Two. This contradiction warrants some further study to find out if the age and experience of these teachers is influencing their beliefs. In addition, since only a few of the participants in this study were National Board Certified Teachers and we know that earning this qualification can impact perceptions of leadership, it is also recommended that an equal number of certified and non-certified teachers are studied to be able to make more reliable comparisons between their responses.

Many states and school districts have a uniform and standardized method of

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

collecting data on teachers' perceptions. For example, North Carolina has the Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Future studies could include analysis and comparison of this data to strengthen and enhance new findings and conclusions.

If this study were conducted again, the term leadership roles needs to be defined clearly and/or a list of specific leadership roles should be given to the participants to select from. A number of the participants listed duties that are not actually considered leadership roles because they have different views of what teacher leadership is than I do. Many of their leadership roles are voluntary or are not appointed by the principal, or they are teaching positions. This made it difficult to analyze that data and draw conclusions about its significance.

This study revealed that teachers may be more likely to ask an administrator for instructional assistance but are then not likely to actually use it. In a future study it would be interesting to see if the same results are found and then to explore them further to find out why the ideas aren't put into practice. Is it that the ideas aren't seen as useful or practical, or are there other reasons?

In order to have this study approved by the NC State Internal Review Board, I had to ensure that all participants could refuse to answer a question if they did not want to answer it. Because of this, of the 59 teachers who answered the questions on Part 1, only 42 answered the questions in Part 2, which decreased the impact of the data. If a similar study were conducted on a larger scale, the surveys could be carried out, either all or in part, in person to

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

ensure a greater number of complete surveys and more data to support findings. In addition, IRB would not approve the study unless the two parts of the study were done separately to protect participant anonymity, but this eliminated any comparisons between the responses in the two parts of the survey as well as comparisons with the interview responses. It would be helpful to know if the answers on the two parts of the survey were consistent, and then if there was consistency with the interview answers. In addition, it would be helpful to collect data on the effectiveness of the various activities in the PIMRS as well as how often they are performed; which actions are being performed at a high frequency but not proficiently and vice versa?

Demographic data was not collected from the teachers who were interviewed for this study, once again due to IRB restrictions about protecting participant anonymity. However, if this study were conducted again, collecting this data would be very valuable and possibly facilitate the ability to draw more specific and influential conclusions.

### **Summary**

To begin this study, I compared educational leadership to an enormous jigsaw puzzle, with hundreds of pieces that look very similar, and claimed that instructional leadership is one, albeit important, piece of that puzzle that allows school administrators to be successful with supporting teachers and facilitating student learning and achievement. Now that the study is complete, it is fair to say that this contrast was correct. The data demonstrated that

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

there are vast and varying perceptions of instructional leadership and administrators as instructional leaders, and that these perceptions are instrumental for administrators to be aware of and consider as they formulate goals and plans for their school.

This research was conducted to gain insight into middle school teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership and why these perceptions, if negative, persist, and then to offer principals and assistant principals with some suggestions and tools that can be employed to change or at least bypass these perceptions for the good of the students. Although this study replicates findings and conclusions from other studies, some new information was discovered as well, such as younger and newer teachers had more negative perceptions of instructional leadership than the older and more experienced teachers, there was not as great of a gap between the number of teachers who believe their administrators are instructional leaders and the number of teachers who don't as was expected, and leadership experience and training did not seem to impact the participants' perceptions. The two research questions were answered, but as is evidenced by the responses given by the participants, more research is necessary in order to fully understand teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership and the causes of those perceptions.

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MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

**APPENDICES**

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## **Appendix A**

### Letter to Teachers

Date

Dear Teacher,

My name is Karen Whiteman, a former Wake County employee, and I am a doctoral student in Educational Administration at North Carolina State University. I am conducting my dissertation research on the perceptions of middle school teachers about instructional leadership and administrators as instructional leaders. My study has been approved by Wake County Public Schools.

I am seeking your participation in my research, which will involve taking a two-part online survey and then participating in the interview if you choose to do so. The survey is administered through eSurveyspro.com.com, a totally secure and anonymous online survey tool and was designed to be completed within about 45 - 60 minutes with a maximum time of 90 minutes, as I know that your time is valuable. The interview, if you participate, will be conducted over the phone and scheduled at your convenience. All information will be kept confidential and there will be absolutely no identifiers to your identity in the study other than the state in which you work.

Please read the attached consent form which explains my study in more detail. If you would like to participate in my research, simply click on the links to the two parts of the

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

surveys and answer the questions. The survey links will remain active until midnight on Sept. 16, 2013. Part 1 of the survey will include a question about participating in an interview. If you indicate that you are willing to participate in the interview process, I will contact you to set it up if you selected to be interviewed.

I would like to thank you in advance for your assistance with this project. Your participation is greatly appreciated and very important to my study. Once the study is completed you will have access to the data and full study through NC State, and the results will be reported to Wake County as well. I hope to learn a great deal from you so I can become a better instructional leader and help other school administrators do the same. If you have any questions, please contact me at XXXXXXXX@XXXXXXX or XXX – XXX – XXXX.

Sincerely,

Karen M. Whiteman

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Appendix B

### Online Survey for Teachers

#### **Part 1**

Please answer each of the following questions. If you have additional comments on any of the questions, please add them in the final question. Please do not mention anyone else's name in this survey.

1. Do you see your principal as an instructional leader?  yes  no
2. Do you see your assistant principal as an instructional leader?  
(the assistant principal with whom you have the most contact)  yes  no
3. Do you believe that administrators *should be* instructional leaders?  yes  no
4. Does instructional leadership include giving suggestions to teachers regarding how to teach?  yes  no
5. Do you agree with the statement "An administrator's main role in a school is to be an instructional leader?"  yes  no
6. Have you ever *asked* an administrator for assistance which would be considered instructional in nature?  yes  no
7. Have you ever *used* a suggestion from an administrator which would be considered instructional advice?  yes  no
8. Have you ever *suggested* that a colleague ask an administrator for advice or help which would be considered instructional in nature?  yes  no

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

9. Demographic Data:

What is your gender?  male  female

Grade(s) taught?  five  six  seven  eight

How long have you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_ years

How long have you been at your current school? \_\_\_\_\_ years

What is your ethnicity? (Caucasian, Hispanic, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

What is the range of your age?

20 – 30  31 – 40  41 – 50  51 – 60  61 – 70  71+

Are you a National Board Certified Teacher or currently pursuing it?  yes  no

How many certifications do you hold? \_\_\_\_\_

What leadership positions do you currently hold?

If none, and you have held leadership positions in the past 2 years, please list them.

What is the highest degree you hold? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Empty box. Please add any general comments you would like to add here.

11. Are you willing to be interviewed for this study?  yes  no

If yes, please list your name and email address and/or name and phone number here:

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### Part 2

#### *Rating Questions*

Please respond to the following statements by choosing the response that best indicates the behavior of your principal during the past school year. Please indicate a response for every item.

To what extent does your principal...

	Almost Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always
1. develop academic goals (AGs) with target dates of completion to improve student performance? Academic goals are goals that have to do with instructional practices.	1	2	3	4	5
2. use needs assessments/surveys to get staff input on academic goals?	1	2	3	4	5
3. develop academic goals that are easily translated into classroom practices by teachers?	1	2	3	4	5
4. utilize data on student academic performance when creating the school's academic goals?	1	2	3	4	5
5. make clear your responsibilities in achieving the academic goals?	1	2	3	4	5
6. communicate the school's academic goals to staff?	1	2	3	4	5
7. refer to the school's AGs in informal settings?	1	2	3	4	5
8. refer to the school's AGs when making curricular or instructional decisions with teachers?	1	2	3	4	5
9. make sure the school's AGs are visible/displayed in the school?	1	2	3	4	5
10. communicate the school's AGs to the students?	1	2	3	4	5
11. conduct informal observations in the classrooms?	1	2	3	4	5
12. ensure that teachers' goals align with school AGs?	1	2	3	4	5
13. attend meetings such as PLT, team, grade level,					

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

subject area?	1	2	3	4	5
14. point out teacher's instructional strengths?	1	2	3	4	5
15. point out teacher's instructional weaknesses in a constructive way?	1	2	3	4	5
16. pay attention to student time on task and discuss with teachers?	1	2	3	4	5
17. provide feedback on specific instructional practices?	1	2	3	4	5
18. make clear who is responsible for coordinating the curriculum school wide?	1	2	3	4	5
19. use the results of school wide testing to make curricular decisions?	1	2	3	4	5
20. ensure that the goals of special programs are coordinated with the school's AGs?	1	2	3	4	5
21. monitor the classroom curriculum to make sure it aligns with the school's curricular objectives?	1	2	3	4	5
22. participate actively in the selection of curricular materials?	1	2	3	4	5
23. meet individually with teachers to discuss student academic progress?	1	2	3	4	5
24. discuss item analysis of tests with the staff to identify strengths and weaknesses in the instructional program?	1	2	3	4	5
25. use assessment results to assess school progress toward school academic goals?	1	2	3	4	5
26. discuss assessment results at least monthly?	1	2	3	4	5
27. identify students whose assessment results indicate a need for enrichment or remediation?	1	2	3	4	5
28. help with finding appropriate programs or techniques to use with students whose assessment results indicate a need?	1	2	3	4	5
29. limit the amount of interruptions of school wide					

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

announcements?	1	2	3	4	5
30. have procedures in place to reduce the number of times students are called to the office?	1	2	3	4	5
31. have consequences in place for students who are habitually tardy or leave school early?	1	2	3	4	5
32. follow up on intrusions to instructional time or when instructional time is not being used wisely?	1	2	3	4	5
33. build relationships with teachers and students by talking with them?	1	2	3	4	5
34. visit your classroom at least once a week?	1	2	3	4	5
35. attend and/or participate in extra-curricular activities?	1	2	3	4	5
36. cover classes when needed?	1	2	3	4	5
37. tutor, provide instruction or assistance to students?	1	2	3	4	5
38. recognize superior instructional performance by teachers publicly?	1	2	3	4	5
39. compliment teachers privately for their efforts or performance?	1	2	3	4	5
40. reward teacher performance with leadership roles and/or opportunities for staff development?	1	2	3	4	5
41. make sure teachers know about professional development (PD) opportunities?	1	2	3	4	5
42. select PD workshops that are consistent with the school's academic goals?	1	2	3	4	5
43. consider teacher requests for PD?	1	2	3	4	5
44. integrate PD into staff meetings?	1	2	3	4	5
45. support use of skills acquired in PD (for example by purchasing needed items)?	1	2	3	4	5
46. ensure that teacher assistants have access to/are provided PD?	1	2	3	4	5

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

47. attend PD activities provided in the school?	1	2	3	4	5
48. provide teachers opportunities to share instructional ideas and practices with the staff?	1	2	3	4	5
49. set and communicate high standards for all students?	1	2	3	4	5
50. set standards regarding utilizing all available time for instruction?	1	2	3	4	5
51. enforce a promotion program based on mastery of academic standards?	1	2	3	4	5
52. support teachers when they enforce academic policies such as grading, homework, or promotion?	1	2	3	4	5
53. recognize students who meet school academic standards publicly?	1	2	3	4	5
54. use assemblies to honor students for their academic successes?	1	2	3	4	5
55. contact parents to communicate improved or excellent academic performance?	1	2	3	4	5
56. comment on students' good work and/or effort (for example when in classrooms or halls)?	1	2	3	4	5

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions for Teachers

Please do not mention anyone's name during the interview.

**Circle:** *Teacher Leader* *Not a Teacher Leader*

1. What is instructional leadership? What do administrators do if they are instructional leaders; what does instructional leadership look like?
2. Do you think that your vision of an instructional leader and instructional leadership is the same as your principal's? Your assistant principal's? Other teachers on staff? How do you know?
3. Do you believe that administrators should be instructional leaders? Please explain. If yes, what what specific actions or strategies should administrators do to be instructional leaders (note if repeat from #1, note those actions that were not listed above)?
4. Do you believe that your principal and assistant principal(s) is (are) an instructional leader(s)?  
**If differences are noted, they will be probed further.**
5. Do you think other teachers in your school feel the same way? How do you know? Why or why not?
6. What do you think is the most important role of an administrator? Why?
7. Do you think other teachers feel the same way? How do you know? Why or why not?
8. Do you think that there are teachers who do not feel that administrators should be instructional leaders? How do you know? Why do you think that is the case?
9. Do you feel that instructional leadership usurps teachers' expertise or control? Explain.
10. What administrative actions that would be considered instructional in nature can be perceived negatively by teachers?
11. Can you describe a situation when one of your administrators demonstrated instructional leadership that was perceived negatively by some teachers (this may include yourself)? A time

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

where the action was perceived positively?

12. What can administrators do to change teacher perceptions about instructional leadership?
13. What behaviors would your principal and assistant principal need to demonstrate in order for you to say "My principal is an instructional leader?"

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Appendix D

### IRB Approval

From: Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator  
North Carolina State University  
Institutional Review Board

**Date: May 23, 2013**

Title: Middle school teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership  
IRB#: 3326

*Dear Karen,*

*The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. **This protocol will expire on May 23, 2014 and will need continuing review before that date.***

NOTE:

You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.

This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.

Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,



Deb Paxton  
NC State IRB

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Appendix E

### Approval to Conduct Research in Wake County Public Schools



#### DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

5625 DILLARD DRIVE  
CARY, NORTH CAROLINA 27518  
PHONE: 919.431-7193  
FAX: 919.431-7215

August 29, 2013

Karen M Whiteman  
36 Rye Place  
Tonawanda  
NY 14150  
RE: **Project No. 1007**

Dear Ms Whiteman:

Your request to conduct research in the Wake County Public School System has been approved. We wish you well in conducting your study, "Middle School Teacher's Perceptions of Instructional Leadership."

Please share this approval letter with the participants of your study as you request their participation. They will make the final decision about participating.

Refer to your project number, 1007, in further correspondence with us. We look forward to learning the results of your study. Please remember to send us a summary of your findings when the study is complete.

Let us know if you have questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Anne-Sylvie M. Boykin'.

Anne-Sylvie M Boykin  
Research Review Committee  
Data and Accountability  
[aboykin@wcpss.net](mailto:aboykin@wcpss.net)  
919-431-7197

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Appendix F

### Informed Consent Form

#### North Carolina State University INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Instructional Leadership

Principal Investigator Karen M. Whiteman

Faculty Sponsor (if applicable) Dr. Kenneth Brinson

---

#### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher named above.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

This study was designed to find out what perceptions teachers have of instructional leadership and to gain some insight into why these perceptions (positive or negative) exist.

#### **What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey with two parts, accessible by the link I have provided. Part 1 includes eleven questions with eight yes/no questions, a question for demographic data, a question that allows you to add any additional information, and a final question asking if you are willing to participate in the interview. Part 2 has 56 Likert Scale questions about your principal's instructional leadership behaviors. It should take 45 – 60 minutes, but no more than 90 minutes total. You will be asked if you would like to participate in a recorded interview as well on Part 1, which is totally voluntary. I will be interviewing up to ten teachers, so you may or may not be actually contacted to be interviewed depending on how many teachers have agreed to be interviewed. If you are contacted, the interview will take about 30 minutes and will be conducted by phone and audio recorded digitally at a time of your choosing.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Risks**

There are no physical risks as a result of participating in this research. If you are uncomfortable with any question on the surveys or interview, you can leave it blank or refuse to answer it. You will also have the option to drop out of the study at any time.

### **Benefits**

You can access the final completed study online through NC State's website, or you can request a copy directly from me. I am hoping that you will gain some knowledge about instructional leadership and a deeper insight of your own beliefs about it. In addition, I hope that some of the questions will inspire you to have conversations and discussions with your colleagues and administrators to bring about student learning and successful changes or reforms in your school.

### **Confidentiality**

The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in separate files in a file drawer until it can be transferred to Word or Excel files which are password protected. The survey responses will be collected on eSurveyspro.com and are kept confidential. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study other than the state in which you work. If I use direct quotes from the interviews they will be assigned a pseudonym which will not resemble your real name in any way, and surveys will be referred to by their assigned a number. If you choose to participate in the interview by filling out question #11 on Part 1 of the survey, after printing the responses I will remove the section that includes your name, email address and phone number from the survey immediately after it is scored, and after the interview is completed the information will be shredded and thrown away. In addition, your Part 1 answers will be deleted from the eSurveyspro.com website so I will no longer be able to link your name with your responses. If you are not chosen to be interviewed, your personal information will be deleted/shredded and thrown away immediately.

### **Compensation**

For participating in the **interview portion** of this study you will receive a \$5 gift card in compensation for your time. If you do not participate in the interview/withdraw without participating in the interview no compensation will be given.

### **What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Karen M. Whiteman, at XXX – XXX – XXXX or XXX – XXX – XXXX or via XXXXXX@XXXXXX

## MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?** If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

### **Consent To Participate**

“I have read and understand the above information. I understand that I can print a copy of this form if I wish. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”