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How does principal leadership influence improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama?

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HOW DOES PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE IMPROVED GRADUATION
RATES IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE GREATER METROPOLITAN AREA
OF BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA?

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham, in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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2016

HOW DOES PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE IMPROVED GRADUATION
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CHRIS TRAWICK

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ABSTRACT

Principals of urban high schools are under extraordinary pressure to improve
graduation rates of high school seniors (Zepeda, 2013). According to Layton (2014),
urban high schools graduate approximately 55% of students, which is well below the
national average of 80%. Greater expectations have been placed on principals to improve
student achievement.

Marzano, Sims, and Warrick (2014) noted that principals are required to improve
student achievement. Zepeda (2013) described the role of principal as the instructional
leader of the school and observed that principals are expected to create and support the
necessary conditions for improving student achievement.

For this study, a phenomenological approach was used to explore how principal
leadership influenced improved graduation rates of urban high schools in the greater
Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama. Ten principals who had seen a minimum of
10% increase in graduation rates in their urban high schools over the last three years were
chosen to participate in this study. Principals participated in semi-structured, one-on-one
interviews.

Data analysis revealed two grand themes: (1) Building relationships, and (2)
Building a culture of expectations, as well as multiple sub-themes. Findings from this

study indicated a high degree of consensus among the 10 participating principals. Principals shared common leadership practices, mutual leadership behaviors, and similar leadership role responsibilities as related to influencing improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama as well as individual perspectives on how principal leadership influenced improved urban high school graduation rates. These findings may have important implications regarding the requisite traits, characteristics, and skills of principals to move low, underachieving schools to school improvement in urban settings.

Keywords: effective principal leadership, relationships, trust, culture of expectations

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research dissertation to my entire family. Kerri, my wife, has supported me with unending love and understanding throughout this entire process. I could not have completed this doctoral program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham without her continued support. I will never be able to thank you enough for how you have helped me accomplish this goal. Whether it was reading endless words on a page or simple dealing with my stress, you always had the right words to say and the right expression to see me through.

To my boys, I promised you three years and I would be done with this process. My how those three years have flown by. To your credit you have been so patient with me while I have worked to complete this doctorate degree. I am so thankful the good Lord has given me such wonderful loving boys. Please don't ever forget how much I love you and how much you mean to me!

This dedication would not be complete without me thanking my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I am so thankful for having a praying mother who taught me where to go and how to go there when I needed strength. Also, for all of her many prayers throughout my life for the Lord to lead, guide, and order my steps along life's journey. Prayer has been the one underlying peace providing me the ability to complete this process. Without prayer this would not have been possible. But as the scripture says, I can do all things through Jesus Christ that strengthens me.

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you for the drive you unknowingly created in me that would push me to complete such a

process as this doctorate degree.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Leadership is not about titles, positions or flowcharts.

It is about one life influencing another."

John C. Maxwell

Reform movements are implemented in schools on a regular basis (Marzano et al.,
(2014). As a result of these reform movements, greater expectations have been placed on
principals to improve student achievement. School leadership plays a critical role in
positively influencing student achievement (Finnigan & Steward, 2009). Further,
researchers have increasingly demonstrated that principals make a difference and can
positively affect student achievement (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, Santoyo, 2012, &
Zepeda, 2013; Hallinger, 2005). Marzano et al. (2014) noted that principals are required
to improve student achievement in the middle of school reform efforts. According to
Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) sound leadership has a
positive influence on organizational improvement; the authors highlighted principal
leadership as a key factor in school success.

Zepeda (2013) described the role of principal as the instructional leader of the
school and observed that principals are expected to create and support the necessary
conditions for improving student achievement. According to Covey (1992), the overall
goal of the principal is to empower teachers while building a collaborative culture for the
purpose of creating effective learning organizations and school communities based on
clearly identified principles and values. Dufour and Marzano (2011) suggested that

practices leading to change must be implemented during school reform in order to improve student achievement. However, implementation of higher expectations calls for increased accountability and consequently leads to principals assuming a greater degree of responsibility for student achievement (Zepeda, 2013).

According to Alao from Urban Education (2015), urban high schools are comprised of high concentrations of low income, high poverty students. Based on reports by the U.S. Department of Education (2015) and Ehrenfreund (2015) from the Washington Post, the overall national high school graduation rate has reached 80%, but only one-third of low income student's graduate. Urban high schools graduate approximately 55% of students, which is well below the national average (Layton, 2014). According to Zepeda (2013), principals of urban high schools are under extraordinary pressure to improve graduation rates of high school seniors due to new accountability measures put in place by state superintendents across the country.

With high school graduation rates as the new measure for high school success, principals need to master new skill sets in order to improve graduation rates in urban high schools. Santoyo (2012) reported that principal leadership is one of the most significant factors affecting student achievement. In order to have the greatest impact, principals must have a thorough understanding of the skills and behaviors needed to be an effective leader. Layton (2014) argued the principal is ultimately accountable for student achievement.

Principal leadership research provides an opportunity to explore ways in which principals seek guidance from leadership research to improve graduation rates. According to Dufour and Marzano (2011), principal leadership and student achievement are

significantly and positively associated with one another. Therefore, in this study, I will use a phenomenological approach to explore how theories of change help principals in urban high schools adapt their leadership styles to improve student achievement and therefore improve high school graduation rates (Santoyo, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The phenomenological problem is the graduation rate of urban high schools. At a graduation rate of 55%, urban high schools face a disproportionately low graduation rate when compared with the 80% national graduation rate average of all high schools, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2015) and Ehrenfreund (2015) from the Washington Post. Concept of the graduation rates of urban high schools is in itself an abandoned topic in research; therefore, there is little to no literature for us to examine when trying to understand the specific framework for improving graduation rates in urban high schools. Therefore, educators are left with limited research to lean on for improving graduation rates of urban high schools.

Zepeda (2013) noted that there are certain characteristics and behaviors associated with effective principal leadership. Examples of these characteristics and behaviors include: courage, prudence, optimism, integrity, humility, reverence, compassion, and fairness (Johnson, 2012). While effective leadership has a direct impact on improving student achievement, these skills are not always taught or supported at the district levels (Marzano et al., 2014).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified leadership behaviors and responsibilities that, when implemented consistently, have a substantial impact on student achievement. Santoyo (2012) observed that a principal's ability to initiate change was

directly related to his or her leadership characteristics and behaviors. Marzano et al. (2014) advocated for principals to master behaviors that will guide their reform efforts in order to improve student achievement and affect positive change.

In change initiatives, one of the problems principals face is deciding which characteristic to use in order to achieve the desired result of improved student achievement. Further, principals are often faced with complexities and negative reactions during times of academic reform (Zepeda 2013).

Principals who are under pressure to improve graduation rates in urban high schools may find this study valuable. What is unknown is how principals are to adapt their day-to-day leadership practices while incorporating specific leadership behaviors. Therefore, this study was intended to provide more information about how principals incorporated leadership behaviors in order to improve student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how principal leadership influenced the phenomenon of improved sub-par graduation rates of urban high schools in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama.

Research Questions

Central Research Question: How does principal leadership influence improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, AL?

Sub-Questions:

1. What leadership practices do principals most utilize in initiating change in regards to improved graduation rates?

2. What leadership behaviors do principals most utilize in improving graduation rates?

3. How does the role of the principal influence students graduating?

See Appendix B for interview questions.

Significance of the Study

As a result of this research, principals, teacher leaders, teachers, parents, students, future researchers, and policy makers may gain new insights regarding change initiatives that positively influence graduation rates. Many schools and school districts are looking for experienced principals who bring the knowledge and skill set needed for improving student achievement. Effective principal leadership when properly implemented, has been shown to facilitate improved student outcomes. Exploring effective principal leadership may provide new information and insights regarding how leadership skills were used to influence improved graduation rates in urban high schools (Marzano et al., 2014).

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations could be present in this study:

1. Focus was on the leadership experiences of urban high school principals in Alabama.

2. Qualitative findings can only be generalized to the group of principals in this investigation; however, insights and observations may shed new light on specific leadership experiences that contributed to their success.

3. Since qualitative research is inherently "value-laden," my own values and personal biases influenced the types of data collected as well as the ways in which data were analyzed and interpreted.

Assumptions

The following assumptions guided this research:

1. It was assumed that participants selected for this study were willing, cooperative, and forthcoming about their leadership experiences.

2. It was assumed that participants offered honest responses to add to the legitimacy of the study.

3. Transcripts of interviews were subject to participant verification to enhance validity.

4. As the researcher, I approached all participants as learners, treating each with respect and accepting all viewpoints as valuable.

Philosophical Paradigm

A constructivist paradigm approach was used to frame this research project. As described by Hatch (2002), a constructivist paradigm allows the researcher to understand the world of human experiences. Creswell (2014) portrayed constructivism as a worldview that guides research practice. Constructivism is based on the assumption that individuals construct reality and meaning based on their prior knowledge and experiences. A constructivist believes that meaning is based upon interactions with one's own surroundings. According to Hoover (2005), constructivism informs the learning of each individual from childhood to adulthood. Experiences provide evidence and opportunities for interactions with the world which, in turn, construct our realities.

As stated by Hatch (2002), constructivism involves multiple realities and is based on individuals' agreement of what constitutes the experience. From a research perspective, the constructivist approach allows the investigator an opportunity to make meaning of others' experiences based on their realities. Constructivist approach was used in order to fully understand the data collected from each participant.

For purposes of this phenomenological study, I used qualitative methods, including a one-on-one semi-structured interview approach. Once all data were collected from one-on-one semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to read through their interview transcripts to insure clarity and accuracy. In addition to accounting for all perspectives, member checking added to the trustworthiness of the collected data.

After these data were transcribed, read, and reviewed by participants, transcripts were coded at three different levels, holistic, in vivo, and pattern coding. Once these coding processes were completed, themes were created to allow for interpretation of the data in a manner that was instructive and meaningful.

From a constructivist perspective, the researcher was a part of the study and used naturalist qualitative research methods to interpret participant perspectives (Hatch, 2002). According to Creswell (2013), as participants view situations they form meanings through various interactions with others. Positions taken by the researcher allows him or her to observe how each one's life experiences are relative to various interpretations. Since qualitative research is interpretive research, one-on-one interviews provided me the opportunity to make accurate interpretations and derive meaning from participants' own experiences. As previously noted, this perspective emphasizes multiple realities since individuals experience the world from various vantage points (Creswell, 2013).

Each principal provided a unique lens through which his or her experience can be viewed in addition to the data needed to conduct this study. Principals saw student achievement increase by way of higher percentage of high school senior graduation rates at their particular high schools. By incorporating and implementing effective leadership behaviors and characteristics, they have raised the bar and met expectations from the state department of education. The role of the principal as an instructional leader is greater today than it ever has been previously in our schools (Zepeda, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (2005) theory of self-efficacy states that a person's judgment of his or her ability and capability to organize and execute a plan of action to obtain certain desired effects and outcomes is dependent on a belief in whether he or she can or cannot complete the task at hand. According to Mestinsek (2000), the principal is the key agent for change within schools. Effective leadership has been the catalyst for school change, student growth, and increased student achievement (Zepeda, 2013).

Bandura's (1979) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy was the guide for the theoretical framework of this study. According to Dufour and Marzano (2011), leadership practices lead to increased student achievement but are dependent on one's belief that he or she can effectively complete a desired outcome. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Hopkins, and Harris (2006) determined that school leadership impacted student achievement.

As stated by Bandura (1979), self-efficacy is a contributing factor to the motivation of individuals as they determine the goals they set for themselves. According to Lashley (2007), principals play a critical role in the process of improving student achievement, and an individual's self-confidence will determine his or her motivation to

be proactive. As an individual's confidence grows in his or her capabilities, the greater his or her efforts will be to perform and complete the task at hand (Bandura, 1979). Leithwood et al. (2004) noted that leadership plays a key role in improving student learning; therefore, it is essential for principals to develop clear goals and understanding of the leadership behaviors needed to positively influence student achievement.

Research literature is replete with examples of the critical connection between leadership and student achievement. Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of leadership and student achievement studies to describe different characteristics and behaviors that are necessary to effectively implement change. Their findings also suggest that these characteristics and behaviors must be surrounded by goals that share collective efficacy, which is an extension of Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory. In order to attain specific goals there must be a shared group belief in the capabilities to organize and execute the needed plans of action required to effectively meet the desired outcomes of the goals (Bandura 1997). Marzano et al. (2014) observed that in school reform efforts in which Bandura's collective efficacy existed within the group certain characteristics and behaviors were directly related to effective leadership and increased student achievement.

Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, and Petzko (2004) along with Santoyo (2012) stated that the principal is the most essential element in increasing student achievement. Principal is a key instrument in leading school reform that is directed at increasing student achievement. In leading school reform, shared beliefs as well as high levels of self-efficacy will have an influence on the school. According to Hoy and Miskel (1996), these conditions frequently led to increases in student achievement. Without high-quality

leadership, high-quality schools cannot exist. Bandura (1997) noted that high levels of self-efficacy are imperative in order for one to believe he or she can accomplish a specific task effectively. According to Bandura (2005), high principal self-efficacy as an instructional leader must be present in order to effectively influence student achievement. With high self-efficacy and a shared belief and vision, collective efficacy of the group will increase and result in student achievement successes.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in this study:

1. Accountability: Accountability is based primarily on student assessments on the ACT along with completion of required core courses and elective courses offered throughout four years of high school (ALSDE, 2015).

2. Collective Efficacy: Collective efficacy describes beliefs which emphasize both self-referent efficacy perceptions as well as beliefs about the unified capability of a school faculty (Bandura, 1997).

3. Constructivism: In constructivism, individuals construct knowledge and meaning based on their prior knowledge and experience. A constructivist believes that meaning is based upon interactions with each one's own surrounding (Creswell, 2014).

4. Hermeneutical Phenomenology: Hermeneutical phenomenology describes a type of experience that interests the researcher and others. In phenomenology, the researcher investigates participant experiences and reflects the themes that emerge from the investigation. Through phenomenology the research engages in an analysis of experience that elicits ideas for further research (Van Manen, 2014).

5. Phenomenon: A phenomenon is the central concept being examined by the researcher. It is the "being" experienced by participants in a study (Van Manen, 2014).

6. Principal: Principals are persons certified for the position of school leader as prescribed by the Alabama State Board of Education and who are employed by an employing board as the chief administrator of a school, including a vocational center (ALSDE, Code of Alabama 2015).

7. Principal Efficacy: Principal efficacy describes an individual's judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school. These beliefs determine how principals feel, think, behave, and motivate themselves (Bandura, 2005).

8. Urban High Schools: Urban high schools are located in large cities and characterized by high rates of poverty with at least 80% of the student population receiving free/reduced meals (National Urban Alliance, 2015).

9. Qualitative Research: Qualitative research is a tradition of inquiry which begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Glazier & Strauss, 1967).

10. Self-Efficacy Theory: Self-efficacy theory depicts an individual's judgment about his or her capability to organize and execute a course of action. Self-efficacy is required to attain a certain level of performance (Bandura, 2005).

11.   Social Cognitive Theory: Social cognitive theory explains how people acquire and

       maintain certain behavioral patterns, while also providing the basis for

       intervention strategies (Bandura, 1979).

Organization of the Study

Five chapters was used to organize this research study. Chapter one provided an introduction as well as a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, assumptions of the study, philosophical paradigm, theoretical framework, definition of terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter two focused on a review of the related literature of the research topic. Chapter three addressed methodology and described the method of inquiry, participants, and site selection as well as strategies for data collection, data analysis, verification, ethical considerations, and the role of the researcher. Chapter four described the analysis of data gained through one-on-one interviews of participants as well as themes that emerged from the data. Finally, Chapter five provided a discussion of research findings as related to current research literature as well as implications for practicing educational leaders and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Purpose of this study explored how principal leadership influenced the phenomenon of improved sub-par graduation rates of urban high schools in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama. Following the review of the literature placed the purpose of this study in context by providing a historical overview of educational leadership as well as the types of practices and behaviors necessary to attain increased graduation rates in urban high schools. Finally, this review of the literature intends to expose a significant gap in the research literature concerning graduation rates in urban high schools.

Six primary sections comprise chapter two of this study: (a) development of the leadership model; (b) development of the principal leadership model; (c) evolving role of principal leadership from manager to instructional leader; (d) principal leadership self-efficacy; behaviors and responsibilities; and (e) the influence of principal leadership on graduation rates in urban high schools.

Researchers have demonstrated that leadership is critical to the success of any institution (Marzano et al., 2014). Specifically, principal leadership has been expressed as vital in achieving school effectiveness (Santoyo, 2012, Zepeda, 2013). However, the essence of principal leadership in the United States has undergone significant changes as the nature of schools and general leadership principles have changed (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). One thing is clear: in order for change to occur in schools, principals must be effective leaders (Zepeda, 2013).

Development of the Leadership Model

According to Bass and Stogdill (1990) leadership is one of the world's oldest preoccupations. The authors defined leadership as an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members. Kotter (1996) stated "(which) leadership model is the providence of the chosen few and the most commonly used in practice" (p. 176). According to Santoyo (2012), leaders are agents of change. Santoyo explained that leaders are persons whose acts affect other people more than other people's acts affect them. Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group. Definitions are all rooted in work by Burns (1978) who noted that leaders induce followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivation, the wants and needs, and the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers.

From a psychological perspective, Stogdill (1974) described leadership based on the assumption that leaders possessed extraordinary personality attributes, abilities, skills, and physical characteristics others did not have. Further, Stogdill explored leadership from a trait perspective and identified the following characteristics of successful leaders: a strong drive for responsibility and task completion, persistence in pursuit of goals, originality in problem solving, drive to exercise initiative in social situations, self-confidence and sense of personal identity, willingness to accept consequences of decision and action, readiness to absorb interpersonal stress, willingness to tolerate frustration and delay, ability to influence other persons' behavior, and capacity to structure social interaction systems to the purpose at hand.

Machine-age thinking became the foundation for organization and management during the 18th century when Frederick the Great achieved military success by instituting standardization, uniformity, and drill training (Senge, 2006). During the 19th century, industrialists patterned their organizations directly after Frederick the Great's army, utilizing systematic structures such as the chain of command, the line, staff organizations, and the training and development approach to learning (Senge, 2006). Murphy (2006) documented that educators of the mid-19th century explicitly modeled their leadership behaviors after factory practices that were prevalent at the time.

Americans were impacted socially, politically, and economically by the industrial revolution in a way that made significant changes in education (Murphy, 2006). During this period of time, America's economy shifted from an agricultural base to an industrial base and ushered in a major change concerning how leaders interacted with followers (Murphy, 2006). According to Murphy (2006), the Industrial Revolution and urbanization elevated the value placed on organizational management, including education, As school districts grew, there was an increased emphasis on implementing standardized practices, and the specialization of school administration was formalized (Kowalski, 2006). Focus on organizational management created a paradigm shift to a new theory of leadership in which individuals assumed leadership positions by virtue of their skills rather than solely based on leadership traits (Clawson, 1999).

Organization of leadership eventually found embodiment in assembly line processes, and scientific progress advanced as a result of increasingly powerful technologies (Senge, 2006; Stogdill, 1974). Technologies were incorporated into assembly line processes, thus enabling increases in labor productivity. Assembly line

produced an unprecedented number of uniformly manufactured objects more rapidly than ever before. Assembly line principles in turn influenced society's perceptions regarding how children should be educated.

According to Senge (2006), these principles were manifested through the following beliefs: children are deficient and schools should fix them; learning takes place in the head, not in the body; everyone should learn in the same way; learning takes place in the classroom, and the idea that there are more "smart" kids than "dumb" kids. Systematic approach to educating children exhibited the following characteristics: schools are operated by specialists who maintain control, knowledge is fragmented, schools communicate the Truth, learning is primarily individualistic, and competition accelerates learning (Senge, 2006).

During the late 1800s through the early 1900s educational goals established for children were centered on their needs and interests by involving a curriculum that was based on hands-on instruction (Murphy, 2006). In fact, based on the writings of Murphy (2006), Dewey was the first researcher to articulate the need for educators to move away from the subject-centered and rigid methods of education and towards educating the whole child. Through the lens of whole child development, Murphy (2006) noted that students should be viewed as total organisms with physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. Further, Murphy (2006) explained that this perspective affirmed Dewey's stated belief that a child's education should be conducted through learning experiences and problem solving processes. According to Dufour and Marzano (2011), there is widespread speculation that certain elements of American education are returning

to this approach in which students learn through experiences and problem solving, just as Dewey envisioned.

German sociologist Weber (1946, 1964) was also a key contributor to school leadership theory. Weber's most influential observations were based on similarities between mechanization of industry and bureaucratic forms of organization (Morgan, 1997). Weber (1946, 1964) developed his study of social change by describing the role of leaders who possess a certain quality of an individual personality. According to Weber (1964), leaders establish broad orientations, propose new norms, articulate new goals, establish organizational frameworks, and mobilize the resources.

Taylor was another key contributor to school leadership theory. Taylor's (1947) approach to leadership was considered more precise than others because it was heavily grounded in engineering principles and practices. Taylor's work led to the development of scientific management, which was more technological in nature than any of its predecessors (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996). Taylor's (1947) work was as follows: discovery by experiment of the best way of performing, the proper time for every operation, every component unit of an operation, best material, tool, machine, and the best flow of work and sequence of unit operations. According to Morgan (1997), Taylor combined the perspective of an engineer with an understanding of management which included a strong emphasis on control, efficiency, quantification, and predictability. Taylor initiated time and motion studies to analyze work tasks and improve worker productivity in an attempt to achieve the highest possible level of efficiency (Morgan, 1997). Based on scientific management theory, the role of the leader is to establish and enforce performance criteria to meet organizational goals (Hersey et

al., 1996), which places greater emphasis on the needs of the organization as compared to the needs of the individual worker (Morgan, 1997).

Maslow (1959) focused on overcoming the perceived shortcomings of classical and scientific schools of management. Hawthorne Studies were conducted between 1927 and 1932 and had a significant impact on the study of leadership in work situations and its effect on leaders and followers (Boyd, 2007; Lovett, 2004). Maslow determined that the reactions of human beings influence their work activities as much as the formal design and structure of the organization (Maslow, 1959). The Hawthorne Effect refers to a phenomenon in which organizational managers demonstrate a concern for their employees, thereby creating increased production as a result of participating in something valuable (Boyd, 2007; Lovett, 2004).

Conceptual leadership began to change based on the idea that individuals operate most effectively when their needs are satisfied (Maslow, 1959). "Hierarchy of needs" (Maslow, 1959) demonstrated that there were more needs than just those that were visible. Maslow explained that once a worker's physiological, protective, and social needs are met, productivity still requires an employee's self-worth needs to be met. Herzberg's (1966) motivation hygiene theory provided insights into the goals and incentives that tend to satisfy a worker's needs. Herzberg (1966) explained that both social needs and self-worth needs should be addressed and met at the same time.

Herzberg (1966) suggested that research on workers' attitudes toward the job could help address difficulties by understanding what factors adequately motivated employees. Herzberg (1966) examined worker motivation by questioning over 200 engineers and accountants. Research included three primary questions: (a) What are the

attitudes of workers concerning their jobs; (b) What give rise to these attitudes; and (c) What outcomes result from these attitudes?

In discussing positive experiences, Herzberg (1966) identified worker events related to achievement, recognition, work accomplishment, responsibility, and advancement. Conversely, workers reporting negative experiences recalled events related to company policy and administration, supervision-technical, salary, recognition, and interpersonal relations with supervisor. Herzberg (1966) concluded that paying attention to motivator factors increased job satisfaction but did not affect job dissatisfaction.

There is a general consensus among researchers that the overall system of school leadership has failed to consider contextual, moral, and ethical issues in decision-making processes (Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Marzano & Durour, 2011; Marzano et al., 2014; Santoyo, 2012; Zepeda, 2013). As theories of educational leadership move toward business management and social science research, the current culture of schools brings about a shift from management to education, with a focus on school administration corresponding to increased accountability requirements from federal, state, and local governments (Murphy, 2006; Redding, 2006).

Effective school leaders know the importance of aligning all parts of their organization to increase student achievement as it relates to meeting district and state standards and goals for improving graduation rates (Zepeda, 2013). Effective school leaders also recognize that it is necessary to understand the complexity and interdependence of systems within an organization when implementing change to achieve desired results (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fullan, 2005, 2006; Sarason, 1991; Schlechty, 2005; Senge, 2006; Zepeda, 2013). The consideration of organization as a whole system

requires systems thinking, which Senge (2006) defined as the ability to understand interactions and relationships in complex systems. As Darling-Hammond (1997) noted, "The solution to the problems of school failure, inequality, and underachievement do not lie within individual schools or fragments of the system, but will depend on major structural changes throughout the system as a whole" (p. 292).

Leaders with an understanding of systems thinking are able to use the concepts of continuous incremental improvement, organizational learning, and feedback loops to promote systemic change (Thornton, Peltier, & Perreault, 2004). Systemic change refers to changing the system rather than merely making a change within the system (Santoyo, 2012; Sarason, 1991). The system as a whole becomes the focus of the reform, rather than just a fragmented part of the system (Jenlink, 1995; Marzano et al., 2014). Senge (2006) identified that learning can occur within any group of disciplines as long as they include the following: personal mastery, defined as the awareness of one's current reality and vision for the future; mental models, the subconscious internal pictures of the world that influence behavior; shared visions; and team learning; which can occur within any group of members if the other disciplines have been addressed.

Senge (2006) also reinforced the power of learning organizations stating, "The learning disciplines offer teachers and administrators genuine help for dealing with the dilemmas and pressures of education today" (p. 7). Leaders can remain focused, predict unforeseen forces, and bring about desired change when they recognize the patterns of specific structures within the organization (Dufour & Marzano, 2011).

Development of the Principal Leadership Model

As the school leader, the principal is often identified as the dominant force behind successful schools (Bell, 2001; Green, 1994). Edmonds (1979) suggested that the most important characteristic of effective schools was strong administrative leadership. Effective administrative behavior, policies, and practices in schools have a significant impact on school effectiveness (Zepeda, 2013).

In 1828, Delaware became the first state to appoint an official, whose sole duty was school supervision (Kowalski, 2006). Schools were originally managed by the church or by prominent and wealthy laymen who were often heavily influenced by the church. The association between schools and the church was a natural pairing since schoolmasters were often ministers of the church or subject to its supervision (Kowalski, 2006). The officials first appointed by the state of Delaware were unique in that their primary obligation was to the school rather than to the church or businesses (Kowalski, 2006). Officials' tasks included visiting and supervising schools; keeping official records; selecting, certifying, and assigning teachers; and settling county and district boundary disputes (Kowalski, 2006).

Hallinger (1992) described how the principal leadership model began in the 19th century at the high school level. As this role evolved, principal responsibilities shifted to leading and managing the school (Goldman, 1966). At the turn of the 20th century, principal leadership revolved around the philosophy that the principal could serve a moral and spiritual role by being attentive to the problems experienced by students (Hallinger, 1992). Philosophy was based on the belief that human beings could be shaped to fit a specific vision of what was considered perfect (Brooks & Miles, 2006).

Beginning in the 1920s and continuing into the 1960s, principals were seen as administrative managers who supervised the day-to-day aspects of the school (Hallinger, 1992). During World War II educational leadership was built on democratic principles. According to Hallinger (1992), school leaders were expected to teach their students American values, and the principal was viewed as a community leader as well as a school leader.

Post-World War II era was a period of dramatic transformation with growing numbers of student, trends toward centralization, and advances in technologies (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Dramatic transformation challenged the United States to make improvements in the areas of science, math, foreign languages, and military superiority, as well as changes in the ways children were taught (Beck & Murphy, 1993). According to Beck and Murphy (1993), demands for more rigorous science and mathematics curricula required the federal government to increase funding for these subjects in public schools (Bybee, 1998). Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958, which provided substantial funding for increasing math and science offerings in America's public schools (Arif & Smiley, 2003). NDEA also established testing of students in core content areas to determine where improvements were needed (Arif & Smiley, 2003).

In the midst of these federal math and science initiatives, legislation was also introduced regarding civil rights protections, desegregation, and compensatory education programs. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a growing recognition on the part of the federal government that it needed to be more involved in improving the quality of instruction in U.S. public schools (Bybee, 1998).

Based on these reforms, there was a dramatic shift in the principal's role towards equity and curriculum reform (Hallinger, 1992). New roles required principals who had maintained the status quo during the middle of the century to become change agents during the 1960s and 1970s (Hallinger, 1992). According to Hallinger (1992), it was during this time that the transition from school manager to instructional leadership began to emerge. Hallinger (1992) suggested that while principals in the 1960s and 1970s were interested in making changes, they were less concerned about the overall effectiveness of these changes and its impact on student performance.

During 1960s and 1970s efforts to improve the professionalism of school principals by engaging the support of stakeholders in principal development were introduced (Brooks & Miles, 2006). Principal leadership became a more specialized discipline, with courses on curriculum development, supervision, personnel development, and group coordination (Brooks & Miles, 2006). In addition to coursework, involvement by the federal government in the operation of public school districts and an increase in the influence of special interest groups on the quality of instruction in public education also influenced the professional nature of principals (Brooks & Miles, 2006). For the first time in public school history, the professional success of school principals was contingent upon the support of external stakeholder groups (Brooks & Miles, 2006).

Beck and Murphy (1993) noted that changes in the 1970s led to the adoption of a humanistic approach among educational leaders. Principals became public relations experts, seeking positive interactions with the community (Beck & Murphy, 1993). Principals were considered visionaries during this time and were expected to draw from the multiple knowledge bases of education, business, sociology, and psychology as well

as be capable of defending their administrative and instructional practices (Brooks &
Miles, 2006).

Much has been written about the nature of changing school systems. For example,
journalist and scholar Silberman published a pivotal book in 1971 entitled, *Crisis in the
Classroom: The Remaking of American Education. Crisis in the Classroom* reached a
broad audience of readers including teachers, students, parents, school board members,
taxpayers, public officials, civic leaders, newspaper and magazine editors, television
directors, and viewers.

Based on Silberman's (1971) work, Costley (2009) identified numerous
advancements that were critical in changing school systems in positive ways. Costley
wrote that education advocated for old-fashioned, good values in which people should
live and stand for such principles as honesty, caring, loving, good-will, mutual respect,
sharing, concern for others, and other human character traits. For Costley (2009)
education must have purpose. To this end, Silberman (1971) proposed that education was
not only a means of transmitting knowledge, abilities, and skills, but also values of
societies, culture, history, and long-standing traditions. However, in order for this to
occur, education had to be re-formed. Silberman (1971) argued that (a) prospective
teachers must be given alternative pictures of what teaching and learning can be, along
with the techniques they need to implement them; (b) teachers should always be students
of learning; and (c) teachers should endeavor to understand how the quality of human
relationships in the classroom can encourage learning or prevent it from occurring.

Ideas by Costley (2009) were an important part of the effective schools
movement. Commonly known as effective schools research, the effective schools

movement began in 1979 with Edmonds, a professor at Harvard University (Hoy &

Miskel, 2001; Sweeney, 1982). Research focused on the analysis of the entire school

building rather than one particular program. Edmonds (1979) identified five

characteristics of effective schools: (a) an orderly environment; (b) emphasis on basic

skills; (c) frequent evaluations of student progress; (d) high expectations; and (e) strong

instructional leadership by the principal.

During this time, instructional programming was not a priority. Instruction was a

primary theme during the 1980s as research stressed the importance of principals as

instructional leaders focusing on the teaching and learning of both students and faculty

(Brooks & Miles, 2006).

Instructional leadership shifted in the 1980s in response to the public's desire for

schools to raise standards and improve students' academic performance (Hallinger, 1992,

2003; Leithwood, 1994). For students to be successful learners, teachers had to be

successful instructors (Hallinger, 2003). For more than a century the principal had served

in the role of a middle manager between central office administrators and teaching staff

(Hallinger, 2003). According to Sergiovanni (2005), principals were now challenged to

develop caring school communities in which strong character emerged from encouraging

students to be successful learners. Principal as an instructional leader became the primary

source of educational expertise in the building (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Instructional leadership focuses on leadership functions directly related to

teaching and learning (Murphy, 1988). Murphy (1990) noted that principals in effective

schools, where the quality of teaching and learning were robust, demonstrated

instructional leadership both directly and indirectly. Principals practiced a conventional

form rather than a shared form of instructional leadership, emphasizing four sets of activities with implications for instruction: (a) developing the school mission and goals; (b) coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (c) promoting a climate for learning; and (d) creating a supportive work environment (Murphy, 1990). Murphy (1990) argued that implementation of these leadership tasks was necessary to improve school functioning and student achievement.

Student achievement was a significant issue in the 1980s (Murphy, 1990). The 1983 report issued by the National Council on Educational Excellence (NCCE) entitled, *A Nation at Risk,* highlighted the failure of public education. Reporting concluded that U.S. schools were in shambles and threatened by the rising tide of mediocrity (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Reporting resulted in a call for more rigorous standards and accountability mechanisms to bring the United States out of its educational slump and into competition with the industrialized world (Amerin & Berliner, 2003). One of the major shortcomings of the *Nation at Risk* study was its overreliance on states and local governments to address this prolonged problem (Lutz & Merz, 1992). However, this report was one of the most significant forces that led to overall school reform (Marzano et al., 2014).

As the effective schools movement gained attention with regard to principal leadership and student achievement, Edmonds (1982) formally identified five characteristics of effective schools. Philosophy behind effective schools was that all students could learn if the prescribed approaches were utilized. Effective schools research incorporated these five concepts: (a) strong administrative leadership; (b) a safe orderly

school environment; (c) clear instructional focus on academics; (d) frequent monitoring of student success; and (e) the belief that all children can learn (Boysen, 1992).

President George W. Bush reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which strengthened the federal commitment to high academic standards, promised extra support, increased flexibility for local schools, and increased accountability as measured by performance on standardized tests (Landgraf, 2003). Legislation refocused principal leadership on instruction and its influence on student achievement than in previous decades (Landgraf, 2003).

Evolving Role of Principal Leadership, From Manager to Instructional Leader

Early on the principal was seen as a managing supervisor not an instructional leader, (Fink & Silverman, 2014). According to Lashway (2002), the change in perspective, from managing supervisors to instructional leaders, is a relatively recent development. In examining the fluid nature of the principalship, Glanz (1998) noted that this role has evolved into the single most important factor in terms of improvements in instruction and student achievement.

Principal leadership role followed the broad social and intellectual movements within the complexity of American society and has reflected both educational and social influences (Glanz, 1998; Lashway, 2002). Principal leadership has been ever-changing since the early developments of the term itself, although the purpose has seemingly been the same: to make education better (Lashway, 2002). Glanz (1998) demonstrated that the role of principal grew from managing supervisors who were educationally untrained to educational instructors who had been trained to focus on improving instruction in order to advance teaching and learning and thereby positively influence student achievement.

Principals were seen as managing supervisors who had little knowledge of or expectations to be instructional leaders (Glanz, 1998; Poole, 1994). According to Tracy (1995), education was not considered a professional discipline in its earliest stages of development. Rather, the principal role was based on the idea of maintaining grounds and enforcing the existing standards of education. Poole (1994) showed that principals struggled to attain status as professionals because being a trained educational professional lost ground to more important views in society.

By and large, educators did not take the lead in initiating societal changes but instead reacted to the various movements and conditions. Glanz (1998) further observed that as the world began to change from an agrarian society to an urbanized society, the role of principal began to develop and revolutionize as well. By the end of the 19th century, inefficiency and corrupt schools had begun to transform into streamlined, central administrative bureaucracies with superintendents and principals in charge, rather than local town and city authorities.

According to Glanz (1998), the role of principal has consistently changed over time and done so in favor of better of education. Glanz (1998) also established a clear and specific understanding of the foundation of the principal's role. Knowledge of the *why's* and *how's* of such a concept in today's field of education is vital in continuing to grow the principal into the most effective model possible (Zepeda, 2013).

Freedom was not a viable option for teachers. Role of the principal was seen as a way to remove deficient teachers rather than to help teachers grow (Button, 1961). Button (1961) also noted that teachers were to accept the authority of the principal as the overseer of the academic enterprise.

Principals used an authoritarian approach to deal with weak and ineffective teachers (Button, 1961). Principals were charged with instructing poorly prepared teachers and then removing the ones who were deficient and incompetent. Principals placed more value on removing and firing teachers than helping them improve and grow their own individual craft of teaching. Historically, principals perceived this approach to be the best way to achieve a quality school. Principals did not understand or recognize that free inquiry and individual initiative were necessary ingredients for the survival and effective operation of a school (Glanz, 1998).

Principals placed more value on authority, direction, and control than on personal initiative (Fink & Silverman, 2014). Many principals had an unwavering conviction that centralized, bureaucratic control would have an unprecedented positive influence on education. Principals established a hierarchy of higher and lower levels of authority in such a way that lower level employees were accountable to the individuals who were one level directly above them. Glanz (1998) explained that these methods were intended to eliminate confusion and incompetence. Principals were to simply govern the school by strengthening their own control and power over the school itself.

According to Zepeda (2013), the principal model has continued to evolve over time from a controlling manager supervisor model to a more helpful, growth functioning model incorporating personal and professionalism traits. Experts have described this contemporary principal model as one that focuses on improving both instructional efficiency and effectiveness (Hoerr, 2008; Marzano et al., 2014).

Further, this model grows the teacher-principal relationship in a way that is non-threatening and low risk (Marzano et al., 2014) as compared to older models that were

high risk and threatening (Button, 1961). In today's schools, the principal model has flourished into new aspects of functioning collaboration with different levels of personnel throughout the school (Santoyo, 2012).

Based on current trends, today's principals have assumed new roles and responsibilities (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). Specifically, the role has grown into more than just the principal's responsibility to one that utilized a collaborative approach including buy-in from assistant principals, department chairs, lead teachers, mentors, and peer teachers (Zepeda, 2013).

Santoyo (2012) suggested that the principal role resembles a new model of helping colleagues improve in all aspects of teaching, instruction, and learning as well as management of the day-to-day functions of school and the overall educational process. New model of helping colleagues improve has led educators in many districts to develop new and improved professional development programs focused on improving teaching and learning (Santoyo, 2012). Professional development is frequently prescribed in a way to directly improve an individual's practice toward better instruction (Hoerr, 2008). Principal role has transformed itself from a single, one-person function into a collaborative effort involving all levels and aspects of leadership (Dufour & Marzano, 2011).

Principal leadership model has developed and expanded from simply thinking about "what I do" to considering "why I do" (Zepeda, 2013). If educators only focus on the what, then they fail to see the real purpose of education. Education is about student learning and student goal achievement (Poole, 1994). Students do this best when they are guided by educators with whom they have built a relationship of trust (Johnson, 2012).

According to Johnson (2012), if we want our teachers to become educators our students can trust, then we must lead them in such a way that this atmosphere is created. New conceptualization of the principal role allows both administrators and teachers to be of one accord in a helpful functioning model (Santoyo, 2012).

Principal leadership model is no longer viewed as the only expert with intentions of passing judgments and critical advice (Poole, 1994). In today's principal model the teacher is seen as an equal partner who contributes valuable expertise and experiences to the educational process (Marzano et al., 2014). Processing allows for a relationship of trust to be created between teacher and administrator (Northouse, 2012). If students are to trust teachers, teachers must trust the principal (Johnson, 2012).

Zepeda (2013) proposed that effective principal leadership only occurs when there is low risk and high reward. Teachers and students must feel that it is appropriate to fail and try again. Trial and error repetition is a productive function of helping teachers improve their skills and practices in the classroom (Marzano et al., 2005). Marzano et al. (2014) agreed this this approach is most effective in growing and improving teachers when the principal-teacher relationship is built on trust and understanding. As written by Poole (1994), "Observers respectfully act on the assumptions that teachers hold the key to unraveling their own instructional dilemmas, thus fostering the supportive but challenging conditions that permit teachers to engage in the reflective transformation of their classroom experience" (p. 287).

Historically, the principal role was performed by non-trained city and town authorities. Now, the principal role is performed by highly trained educational professionals. Once guided by the practice of inspecting the work of teachers (Glanz,

1998), the principal role is now a function of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of instruction (Zepeda, 2013). New principal models leads to better instruction, increased learning for students, and higher levels of student achievement (Santoyo, 2012). Principal in the modern era has grown into a collaborative effort aimed at improving not only instruction and student achievement but the school as a whole and its many stakeholders (Zepeda, 2013).

Principal Leadership Self-Efficacy, Behaviors, and Responsibilities

According to Bandura (1979), principal self-efficacy is an individual's judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads. As stated by Leithwood et al. (2004), there is a significantly positive relationship between principal leadership and student outcomes operating indirectly through certain school conditions. Bandura (1997) explained that a principal's self-efficacy beliefs have a significant impact on his or her level of aspirations and goal setting, effort, adaptability, and persistence. McCollum and Kajs (2009) detected a clear relationship between school administrator's efficacy and school administrators' goal orientation.

Being an efficacious administrator is largely connected to having a strong mastery goal orientation. McCollum and Kajs (2009) further described self-efficacy as an important construct in developing educational leaders. Self-efficacy is a construct connected to success in learning and success in work (McCollum & Kajs, 2009). Bandura (1997) proposed that self-efficacy beliefs influence the level of effort and persistence principals put forth in their work as well as their resilience in the face of setbacks.

According to Federici and Shaalvik (2012), principals with a low sense of efficacy perceive an inability to control the environment. Additionally, principals with low self-efficacy are less likely to hold themselves accountable for student achievement and less likely to take credit for increased student achievement.

Principal efficacy beliefs tend to increase with the complexity of the job (Bouchamma, Basque, & Marcotte, 2014). Bouchamma et al. (2014) demonstrated that principals who were highly efficacious spent more time on instructional concerns and expended a greater amount of energy for longer periods of time, while also bouncing back from failure more quickly in the face of adversity. Smith, Guarino, Storm, and Adams (2006) suggested that urban high schools, which are primarily comprised of students from high poverty areas, would greatly benefit from principals with high levels of efficacy in instructional leadership.

According to Lyons and Murphy (1994), principals with high levels of efficacy lead by example. Principals with high levels of efficacy use personal sources of power to influence teachers as compared to policies, procedures, and limitations imposed by the law. Specifically, principals with low levels of efficacy use coercion and rewards to influence teachers and tend not to believe they can affect student achievement positively or negatively (Lyons & Murphy 1994). Conversely, principals with high levels of efficacy have a greater outcome expectancy to effectively facilitate teaching and learning at their respective schools which in turn leads to increases in student achievement (Bandura, 1997).

According to Marzano et al. (2014), research over the last 35 years provides strong guidance on specific leadership behaviors for school administrators, and these

behaviors have been shown to have positive effects on student achievement. The Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning along with Marzano and colleagues conducted meta-analyses of 69 studies involving 2,802 schools and more than 14,000 teachers. Ten of these studies focused solely on high school students enrolled in 371 schools. Based on study results, Marzano et al. (2005) established a positive connection between school leadership and student achievement. Johnson (2012) and Northouse (2012) concurred with the findings of Marzano and colleagues by identifying corresponding behaviors, all of which placed a renewed focus on the ability of school leaders to positively affect student achievement.

Furthermore, Johnson (2012) identified specific principal leadership behaviors that have been connected to leading effective schools. First and foremost, Johnson (2012) acknowledged courage as a key behavior in leading an effective school. Courage is the ability to overcome fear in order to make the right decision and do the right thing. Hitt (1990) called doing the right thing making good decisions. Courageous leaders move forward despite the risks and costs; administrators must lead with courage. When making difficult decisions, Kidder (2005) argued that leaders need to act with courage. Leaders realize the risk and dangers associated with leading and continue to act in an appropriate way in order to be effective. Johnson (2012) also stated that leaders who have courage are able to serve, challenge, participate in change, and leave when it is time.

Second, Johnson (2012) suggested that effective leaders must exercise prudence. Prudence is the ability to select the best course of action in any given situation. Whether leaders act with compassion, sternness, or courage, prudence is the factor that allows them to make the right decision. Prudence is a key ingredient in being an effective leader.

According to Santoyo (2012), administrators have a responsibility to exercise authority in an effective way. Teachers must be convinced and trust in the fact that the administrator's point of view reflects character and values they support (Morris, 1999).

Third, Johnson (2012) identified optimism as a critical element to effective leadership. Regardless of the situation, optimistic leaders always expect a positive outcome. Even in the face of failure and disappointment, an optimist sees the positive in everything. Optimistic leaders are often seen as visionaries who can both articulate and communicate the vision. According to Bass (1985), effective leaders must be able to develop, transmit, and implement vision.

Fourth, Johnson (2012) identified integrity as an integral behavior of effective leadership. Johnson (2012) stated, "Integrity lies at the very heart of understanding what leadership is" (p. 85). Integrity is a trait that may become stronger over time, and thereby promote increased wisdom. Integrity is a trait that lies within, yet it also presents itself for others to see. Leaders with integrity are consistent in their behaviors whether people are looking or not looking. Integrity is also closely connected to the concept of trustworthiness. In the absence of integrity things become inconsistent and dishonest and a state of apathy may set in among organizational members. Once trust is broken, performance and achievement will suffer. Effective leaders with integrity build and grow trust daily. Schools that are led by effective leaders promote student achievement and enhanced levels of student learning as primary goals.

Fifth, effective leaders are humble. Johnson (2012) stated, "Humility has a powerful impact on effective behavior. Effective leaders are less likely to be corrupted by power, claim excessive privileges, engage in fraud, abuse followers, and pursue selfish

goals" (p. 88). Effective leaders are servant leaders. They put others' needs before their own.

Sixth, effective leaders are good communicators. Good communicators listen to the emotions as well as the words of what people are saying. Effective leaders have an ability to express themselves in the most appropriate ways and build connections with others. Generally, they also possess the quality of being active listeners. According to Spiro (2013), effective administrators show they care about the people in their building by listening to them informally and intently. Effective leaders listen with an intention to hear parents, teachers, and students (Johnson, 2012). If student achievement is related to effective leadership, then the abilities to communicate and listen are important. An effective administrator should be able to lay out his or her expectations to teachers, parents, and students so that everyone is fully engaged in a mutually acceptable collaborative effort (Northouse, 2012).

Seventh, Johnson identified reverence as a critical element of effective leadership. Reverence is closely related to humility; it is the ability to feel the appropriate emotion at the appropriate time. Reverence is a generous attribute that allows leaders and followers to reach common goals. Reverent leaders regard the group as more important than themselves. A sense of reverence frequently accompanies supporting unpopular ideas or telling the truth even when the truth hurts. Reverent leaders rely on persuasion rather than force and defer to self-sacrifice in place of blame.

According to Johnson (2012) the eighth characteristic of effective leadership is compassion. Compassion is a behavior that comes from hardship and suffering. Hardship teaches leaders to have compassion for others during their time of suffering. Compassion

for others comes from a leader having experienced emotional pain and suffering. According to Dufour and Marzano (2011), effective leaders must be able to show compassion when and where it is needed.

In school settings, effective leaders extend compassion to students as well as faculty and staff members. Morris (1999) described caring as both natural and ethical, and Bass (1985) noted that all dimensions of effective leadership were positively related to caring. According to Morris (1999), caring emphasizes responsibility and relationships and requires the ability to listen actively and carefully make decisions with the goals of affirming and encouraging the best in others.

Finally the last characteristic of effective leadership is commitment to fairness and justice. Acting with justice entails following the rules in all matters. An effective leader makes fair rules and exercises just consequences. Effective leaders are called to use justice to correct wrongs and to do right by others. According to Rutherford (1985), effective administrators exhibit the following five essential qualities:

Effective administrators have clear, informed visions of what they want their schools to become. They have visions that focus on students and their needs. Effective administrators translate these visions into goals for their school and expectations for the teachers, students, and administrators. Goals include meeting the learning needs of the students or helping teachers adjust to a changing school population. Effective administrators establish school climate that supports progress toward these goals and expectations. Effective administrators continuously monitor and check progress. Effective administrators intervene in a supportive or corrective manner when it is necessary. (p. 32)

Effective administrators are individuals who have established relationships with building staff, community members, and district personnel who are responsible for meeting the major goals of the school (Zepeda, 2013). Effective administrators direct their energy toward accomplishing goals which encourage positive thinking and emotional growth of students, while involving all others, both in and out of the school. (Spiro, 2013)

Rutherford (1985) noted that effective administrators are committed to developing supportive school environments, but many seek to accomplish this goal by using various behaviors. Therefore, it is a leader's behaviors that truly define his or her effectiveness.

According to Santoyo (2012), effective administrators lead with behaviors which emphasize student learning. Spiro (2013) stated effective schools led by an effective administrator, focus first and foremost on learning. Johnston (1985) stated effective schools support achievement as well as academic and intellectual tasks while providing opportunities for everyone to succeed. According to Spiro (2013), learning should be at the center of a school leader's job along with participating in the life of the school and shaping its course from the inside out, from the classroom to the office.

Spiro (2013) described effective administrators of effective schools as instructional leaders. Finding time to engage in instruction is not easy, but effective administrators manage to do so. Effective administrators distribute leadership roles while providing staff with guidance and students with motivation to succeed. Effective administrators leading effective schools set high standards and appropriate, rigorous goals for every student.

According to Johnston (1985), every effective school is led by a strong administrator who provides sound leadership for a dedicated faculty. Effective administrators allow teachers to operate at maximum levels of performance. Spiro (2013) stated effective leadership strengthens professional communities, creating a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning. Johnston (1985) further noted that effective leaders allows individuals to fulfill their needs determining how effective the teachers in the school will be and ultimately, how effective the school will be in improving student achievement.

Spiro (2013) stated effective administrator's boost teaching by keeping track of teachers' professional development needs, monitoring instruction in the classroom, and giving substantial feedback to teachers. As stated by Spiro (2013), "Research shows that administrators at schools with high teacher ratings for instructional climate are also administrators who rank highest when it comes to developing an atmosphere of caring and trust making teachers feel safe, valued, and cared for" (p. 29).

Effective administrators are able to use these behaviors to create ownership and personal belonging to the school (Johnson, 2012). Behaviors allow leaders to know their faculty and staff in informed ways, and implementing these behaviors leads to becoming and effective administrator (Marzano et al., 2014). Effective administrators develop and build effective schools by expecting the best from everyone including themselves (Zapeda, 2013). To be effective, leaders must be open-minded and adhere to the core roots of teaching and learning.

As noted by Cooley and Shen (2003), "The increase in pressure has resulted in a call for more responsibility by effective principal leadership to address student

achievement" (p. 11). Historically, pressure to educate students occurred at all levels. With the creation of contemporary school accountability systems, the responsibility for educating students is now placed primarily at the local level and most frequently connected to the local school principal (Zepeda, 2013).

Transcending traditional roles of the school leader, this pressure challenges principals to build teams and encourage the informal leadership capacity of others who have a stake in the school (Santoyo, 2012). Leadership is becoming less about the leaders themselves, and more about the responsibility of collective learning and collaborative shaping of schooling in general, and the shaping of knowledge in particular explained Williams-Boyd (2005). Principals are increasingly the focus of school reform programs (Marzano et al., 2014). Principals frequently find themselves in the eye of the storm as society, conditioned by instant gratification and change, expects immediate results from the latest reform efforts (Cooley & Shen, 2003).

Creation stronger, more rigorous standards and accountability has dramatically changed the role of the principal (Cooley & Shen, 2003). While the school principal has always been expected to perform a variety of roles, principals now have a responsibility to create and maintain effective school programs for all students (Burrello, Schrup, & Barnett, 1992; Hallinger, 2005). According to the Council of Administrators of Special Education, Inc. (2014), principals are responsible for overseeing all aspects of the curriculum, including plans for students with a range of educational needs.

Additionally, principals are responsible for a wide range of other outcomes including attaining organizational goals, maintaining integration of the organizational system, adapting to forces in the organization's external environment, and establishing

and maintaining cultural patterns (Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Thurston, 1992).

According to Sergiovanni (2005), principals must address issues as varied as single

parent families, homelessness, substance abuse, suicide, teen pregnancy, and

unemployment. All of these issues challenge educators in meeting the educational and

social needs of students. Schools leaders who cling to traditional patterns of school

organization are unable to provide appropriate and equitable educational opportunities to

a variety of students (Sergiovanni, 2005). Santoyo (2012) indicated that today's societal

demands require principals to increasingly assume more responsibilities including but not

limited to increased learning objectives, teaching approaches, management structures,

and support for teachers and students.

The Influence of Principal Leadership on Graduation Rates in Urban High Schools

Various authors were cited throughout this literature review explaining how

research findings have supported the positive influence of principal leadership on student

achievement. What is missing, however, is a better understanding of whether or not

principal leadership influences graduation rates in urban high schools. Studies regarding

urban high school graduation rates are lacking. Concept of graduation rates of urban high

schools is an abandoned topic in research; therefore, there is little to no literature to

examine to develop a framework for increasing graduation rates in urban high schools.

Because of this paucity in the research literature, principals are left with scant evidence

for increasing graduation rates in urban high schools.

Principals need wisdom, knowledge and proven strategies to increase graduation

rates in urban high schools. Year after year, students fail to graduate from urban high

schools and depart with limited options for their future. According to the National Urban

Alliance (2015), an urban high school is defined as a school that is located in a large central city and within a high poverty community. Urban high schools are often categorized by low expectations, student alienation, underachievement, and high dropout rates according to the NUA (2015). Frequently, financial resources are inadequate and teachers are poorly trained. Further, curricula and instruction seldom reflects actual student needs and interests, especially for students who are racial minorities, students who speak English as a second language, or those who have not been well-prepared for high school work. Principals in urban areas leading urban high schools face many challenges and need proven effective research in order to close the achievement gap and improve graduation rates (Jackson & McDermott, 2012).

Goals of this research endeavor is to equip principals, teachers, parents, students, community stakeholders, future researchers, and policy makers with new insights regarding introducing change initiatives that positively influence graduation rates in urban high schools.

Summary of the Literature

Purpose of this chapter was to describe the evolved role of principal leadership by tracing the development of the leadership model and connecting it to the principal leadership model. Further, this chapter outlined the development of the principal leadership model and its evolution from manger to instructional leader. It also uncovered the importance of principal leadership self-efficacy, principal leadership behaviors, and principal leadership responsibilities. Finally, this chapter provided the rationale for exploring principals and their leadership experiences to uncover the ways in which they may influence graduation rates in urban high schools in the metropolitan area of Birmingham, AL.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions that the researcher

makes in deciding to undertake a qualitative study (Glazier & Strass, 1967). According to

Stake (2010), qualitative research is interpretive, depending on what the researcher

interprets experientially, frequently using themselves as instruments. Qualitative

researchers bring to the research investigation their own worldviews, paradigms, and sets

of beliefs that inform the analysis and writing of the research study (Marshall &Rossman,

2011). Qualitative research is conducted if there is a need to empower individuals to

share their life experiences (Creswell, 2012).

Glazier and Strauss (1967) explained that researchers use qualitative research to

gather small gains from existing experiences. Typically, qualitative research takes place

in the natural settings, allowing the researcher to gain invaluable detail about the research

participants and their environment (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, investigators

seek to understand the world from the standpoint of those who live in it (Hatch, 2002).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) described that qualitative data are collected through open-

ended interviews, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the

data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) wrote qualitative data is useful in both verification and

the generation of theory depending on circumstances of the researcher's primacy.

Researchers typically make knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist

perspectives or advocacy, participatory perspectives or both as they interact within a

certain environment (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is designed to explore social experiences, meanings they have for participants and how they work together in the process (Stake, 2010).

Research Questions

Central Research Question: How does principal leadership influence improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, AL?

Sub-Questions:

1. What leadership practices do principals most utilize in initiating change in regards to improved graduation rates?

2. What leadership behaviors do principals most utilize in improving graduation rates?

3. How does the role of the principal influence students graduating?

See Appendix B for interview questions.

Methods

The research method used in this study is a type of qualitative research known as hermeneutical phenomenology. Hermeneutical phenomenology is a type of phenomenology research that directly aims lived experiences and interpreting the texts of life (Van Manen, 1997).

According to Van Manen (2014), hermeneutical phenomenology aims at attaining a profound understanding of the meaning of our daily experiences and asks questions in reference to those daily experiences. Giorgi (1997) suggested phenomenology is an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the

lived experiences. Van Manen (2014) and Creswell (2013), further explained, the hermeneutical phenomenology process describes a type of experience that interests the researcher and others, investigates the experiences and reflects the themes that emerge from the investigation and phenomenology engages in an analysis of experience that elicits ideas for further research.

Moustakas (1994) described this type of analysis as content analysis and stated it involves three steps: (1) phenomenological reduction, (2) imaginative variation, and (3) synthesis. This analysis is also inductive, as researchers are concerned less with generalizations to other populations than with rich contextual descriptions. Phenomenological research provides a lens to view all human phenomena as meaningful, as it gives insight into the ways in which humans experience various phenomena to reality (Moustakas, 1994).

As explained by Van Manen (1997) the lived experience is the preliminary point and the end of phenomenological research. Van Manen (2014) stated the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is a reflection of something meaningful. Giorgi (1997) explained that in order for a qualitative research study to qualify itself as a phenomenological method it must employ description, it must aim within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction, and seek the most invariant meanings for a context.

My intent in this study was to uncover how people make sense of and interact with their social world. The phenomenological approach was selected for this research to provide a greater elaboration of the connection between principal leadership and its influence on student achievement. This study attempted to show the experience of

principals from urban high schools across Alabama in relation to the leadership practices

they have used to attain increases in graduation rates in their school.

Participants and Site

The Alabama High School graduation rate report combined with a list of urban

high schools was used in determining which schools and principals did participate in this

research study. Participating principals in this study consisted of 10 principals across

many school districts who are currently leading an urban high school in the greater

metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama. Principals have been at their particular urban

high school for a minimum of three years, as well as principals who have seen a

minimum improvement of 10% in graduation rates over the last three years, see

Appendix C for graduation rate percentage of increase. Principals chosen to participate in

this research study received an invitation letter before any research occurred (see

Appendix A).

Demographics and Summary of the Greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, AL

In order to understand the research, it is important to examine the demographics

of the Greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham. The greater metropolitan area of

Birmingham as defined by The Office of Management and Budget includes seven

counties and 22 cities, more than 20 school districts that include over 60 high schools,

and a population of 1,140, 300 (OMB: February 2015).

In the metropolitan area, the overall population breakdown by race is 63% white,

30% African American, 4% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% reported other; by gender 48%

male and 52% female (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The poverty rate varies

between 25%-78% depending on certain factors, such as high school graduation and

single parent families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In a March 2010 article on al.com, Leech reported that Alabama has 264 persistently low achieving schools; metro Birmingham claims 51 of these. The low achieving schools in metro Birmingham are from urban areas, serve poor populations, and receive Title I dollars from the federal government (Leech, 2010). Title I funds go to schools that have a high poverty rate where at least 35% of students participate in the free and reduced-price program for breakfast and lunch.

Schools are divided into three tiers. Tier I is the neediest and lowest performing in the state as well as any high school that has a graduation rate of less than 60% for three years and elementary schools performing in the bottom 20%. All Tier I schools are served by Title I funds. Tier II is the next level of schools considered low performing but which do not receive Title I funds although they are eligible. Schools in Tier II are low achieving secondary schools. Tier III schools are those in the bottom 20% in the state that do not qualify for Tiers I or II (al.com, 2010). Ganucheau (2015) reported that six Birmingham-area high schools ranked among the best in the country. Showing academic progress had taken place in schools located throughout the Greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham.

Participant Selection

Principals were selected from urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama, by way of purposeful sampling. Creswell (2013) described purposeful sampling as choosing participants and site based on their ability to inform understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon, insuring a sample that is accurate and adequate to the research study being performed. More specifically,

maximum variation sampling was the type of purposeful sampling used in selecting these principals. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) explained maximum variation sampling seeks participants by including a wide range of extremes. Maximum variation sampling is a method of purposeful sampling used to select a diverse number of participants relevant to the research study (Miles et al., 2014). By using this particular method of purposeful sampling the weaknesses of the study are transformed by way of using multi-diverse participants (Miles et al., 2014).

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers use interviewing to uncover meaning of participants experiences (Hatch, 2002). Kvale and Brinkman (2009) wrote the interview process has become the main data collection procedure used in qualitative research. Phenomenological study is focused on collecting data involving in-depth interviews of participant. Research sites were the actual high school of the particular participant. I gained permission from the principal before conducting and entering the research site.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) described three types of interviews: unstructured, structured, and semi-structured. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) noted that interviews can be used for gathering data and also used during the evaluation process. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), semi-structured interview questions are fully decided, whereas others might not be fixed. Additionally, researchers have leeway to ask follow-up questions. Ideally compromising, it gives structure to the interview, but also gives flexibility. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) explained that interview questions need to come from the research question of the experiment. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009),

the rule of thumb for how many participants should be interviewed needs to remain around 10.

In this research study the interview process was conducted as one-on-one semi-structured interviews with participants. I used a digital recorder to record participant responses. Open-ended questions were asked during the interview sessions in order to engage participants in needed dialogue about their experiences. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and took place at the site of the actual high school. I discussed the process, purpose, amount of time needed, and plans for the interview results with each participant before starting the interview session. Confidentiality was of the utmost importance. Principals and high schools were given research names for the study, minimizing the opportunity for participants to be recognized.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research consisted of the following strategies: (1) preparing to organize the data, (2) reducing the data in themes with coding, and (3) data being represented in tables, figures, graphs, or charts (Creswell, 2013). Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning (Vagel, 2014). Data analysis is the process used to show what has been learned by others. Hatch (2002) described data analysis as organizing and interrogating data in ways allowing researchers to generate theories, make interpretations, discover relationships, identify themes, develop critiques, and discover patterns though data. Glazier and Strauss (1967) stated analysis is the development and primary verification of theories.

Creswell (2013) recommended that data transcripts be read several times in their entirety. Creswell also suggested organizing data with key concepts, field notes, and short

phrases. Once the data have been organized, Hatch (2002) recommended interrogating the data. Saldaña (2012) stated we can interrogate the data with many cycles of coding. In this research study, three cycles of coding were used, holistic, in vivo, and pattern.

Dey (1993) explained holistic coding as an attempt to grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole rather than by analyzing them line by line. Dey (1993) stated this method is a broad brush preparatory approach to a unit of data before a more detailed coding process takes place. Bazeley (2003) described this method of coding as applicable when the researcher already has a general idea of what to investigate in the data. Holistic coding is a time saver for those with massive amounts of data and a short period to complete the analytic work (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After a first review of the data, data can be brought together and examined as a whole before deciding upon any refinement (Dey, 1993). Holistic coding is appropriate for qualitative researchers learning how to code data and studies with a wide variety of data forms (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) referred to in vivo coding as literal coding and verbatim coding. The root meaning of in vivo is in that which is alive and as a code refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record (Strauss, 1987). In vivo refers to a code based on the actual language used by the participant (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Words or phrases are selected as codes that seem to stand out as significant or summative. If the same words, phrases, or variations thereof are used often by the participant and seem to merit an in vivo code, then it should be applied. In vivo codes can provide a crucial check on whether the researcher has grasped what it significant to the participant and may help crystallize and condense meanings

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(Charmaz, 2006). Corbin and Strauss (2008) recommended that when using this style of coding, codes should be placed in quotation marks as a way of designating that the code was extracted directly from the data record.

Pattern coding as described by Miles and Huberman (1994) are codes that pull together a great deal of material into a more meaningful unit of analysis that identifies an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), pattern coding is appropriate for coding after the initial coding, development of major themes, a search for rule, causes and explanations, examining social networks and patterns, and the formation of theoretical constructs and processes. Pattern coding is a way of grouping units of analysis into a smaller number of sets, themes, and constructs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Themes, relationships, and different patterns throughout the data can be divided into more workable units for the breakdown and analysis of data (Clark, 2005). Creswell (2013) stated that once concepts are in place the researcher can establish his or her own views. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) recommended that data be divided into five to seven specific themes.

Validations Strategies

Creswell (2013) claimed validation as a means to assess accuracy of data findings. Validation strategies add credibility and authenticity to the research. Creswell (2013) recommended at least three validation strategies be used with qualitative research. For the purpose of this study, the following strategies were used to insure the credibility of the research: triangulation; member checking; external audits; peer debriefing; and thick, rich description.

Triangulation

Yin (2014) described triangulation as a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws. It can involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, and/or multiple methods. Yin (2014) continued, the strategy of triangulation is often guided by the assumption that data from different sources or methods must necessarily converge or be aggregated to reveal the truth. Without multiple sources of data audits an invaluable advantage of the research study could be lost. Triangulation allows the previously data collection methods to be merged into related themes ensuring that reliability is the utmost importance (Yin, 2014).

Member Checking

In order to insure credibility, participants views of the data collected were solicited during the process. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), this technique is the most critical for establishing credibility. Member checking involves the researcher taking data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions back to participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 2013). Further, member checking allows participants to play an active role in the process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Research drafts were provided to each participant to insure accounts documented had not been misconstrued.

External Audits

External audits are explained by Merriman (2009) as another means to establish accuracy of the data; external consultants are also suggested by Creswell (2013). External consultants are individuals who serve objectively because they do not have a connection to the research study. External audits allow the auditor to determine if the findings,

analysis, and interpretation are supported by the research data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing was used as a fourth method to insure accuracy and authenticity of the research data. Creswell (2013) stated peer debriefing allows the researcher's peer to evaluate the collected research data. The peer is to remain honest with the researcher concerning the study. The peer is to allow the researcher to disclose any issues or concerns with the research study (Merriman, 2009). Colleagues and members of the dissertation committee served in the debrief capacity.

Thick, Rich Description

Thick, rich description is described by Geertz (1973) as a way of achieving a type of external validity. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Thick, rich description was first used by Geertz (1973) who applied it in ethnography. According to Geertz (1973), thick, rich description should specify many details, conceptual structures, and meanings. Geertz (1973) explained that a researcher must present a thick description which is composed not only of facts but also of commentary, interpretation, and interpretations of those comments and interpretations, and extract meaningful structures that comprise a culture of research. For this, Geertz (1973) stated that a factual account of information would not suffice for these meaningful structures of the research without thick, rich descriptions.

Ethical Considerations

I gave attention to all requirements associated with the University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board (UAB IRB). Written consent was obtained before principals participated in this study. I also obtained permission from the UAB IRB prior to data collection. All of the principals were provided with an informed consent document prior to the start of data collection. Principals were also informed of all data collected. I was able to keep the confidentially of participants by masking names in the data. Each principal who participated in the study was notified of his or her right to not participate in the study at any time. If any participant was uncomfortable while participating in this study, he or she had the option to discontinue at any time. Further, permission to conduct this study was obtained from each of the principals' superintendent. A letter was sent to the superintendent detailing all aspects of the study and assuring that all policies of the district would be adhered to. One major benefit that participants could experience during this study was the knowledge that the information they provided could in turn contribute to better outcomes in their profession as related to principal leadership and increasing student achievement.

Position of the Researcher

According to Charmaz (2011), the concept of researcher position includes attention to assumptions researchers have about the topic, their relationship to the topic, and reflexivity about their own identities and feelings connected to the topic. Marshall and Rossman (2011) demonstrated the importance of the researcher's position refrain from biasing the study during data collection and interpretation as well as in writing the final analysis. Milner (2007) discussed how ignoring position may be dangerous to the researcher during the study in regards to the research. The position of the researcher

matters tremendously because it determines how he or she represents participants involved in the research study (Charmaz, 2011).

I have been an educator for 19 years. I taught Science in urban high schools for 10 years in Alabama. I worked as a Biology graduation exam remediation teacher as well for seven years. The last five years I have served as an assistant principal in an urban school setting. As the researcher, I am experienced as an instructional leader. I functioned as the primary instrument for the data collection and analysis throughout this phenomenological study. Importantly, I understood the philosophical perspectives behind this approach to research, especially the concept of studying how people experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

Being directly involved as the researcher in data collection and analysis is one of the challenges of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). However, I took the proper steps in order to limit the influence of researcher bias. Additionally, several validation strategies were used in this study to address concerns pertaining to validity and reliability.

Chapter 4

Findings

Findings of this qualitative study represent the opinions, perspectives and experiences of 10 participating principals who are currently leading an urban high school in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama. Findings of this qualitative study also represent principals who have seen an improvement in graduation rates over the last three years (see Appendix C). Research questions and sub-questions were used in semi-structured interviews in order to explore participant experiences regarding the phenomenon of how principal leadership influences improved sub-par graduation rates in urban high schools.

A great deal of consensus emerged from this research study among the participants, establishing clear themes related to how principal leadership influences improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama. Table 1 presents characteristics of the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama

Characteristics	
Counties	7
Cities	22
School Districts	20
High Schools	60
Race – White	63%
Race – African American	30%
Race – Hispanic	4%
Race – Asian	2%
Race – Other	1 %
Gender – Male	48%
Gender – Female	52%
Poverty Rate	~ 48%
Low Achieving Schools in AL	264
Low Achieving Schools in Birmingham	51
Best High Schools in the Country located in Birmingham, AL	6

Participants in this research study had seen improved graduation rates while using the same methods and strategies for progress. Participants answered research questions and sub-questions using similar constructs, paralleling each other in various ways. Based on semi-structured interviews and quotes throughout this research study themes emerged. Two grand themes emerging out of this research study were building relationships and building a culture of expectations. Caring, meeting the needs of students, listening, communicating, and trusting were sub-themes comprising building relationships. High principal efficacy, creating vision and value, one-on-one goal setting, mentoring and tracking students were sub-themes comprising building a culture of expectations. Table 2 presents the major themes and sub-themes.

Table 2
Summary of Themes and Sub-themes

Relationships	Culture of Expectations
Caring/Compassion	High Principal Efficacy
Meeting the Needs of Students	Creating Vision/Value
Listen	One-on-One Goal Setting/Buy-In
Communicate	Mentor/Track Students
Trust	Trust

Chapter 4 provides analysis and discussion of the relevant themes revealed by the data from semi-structured participant interviews. Table 3 presents demographics for each participant.

Table 3
Demographic Data for Participants

Participant	Gender	Race	Degree	Administration Experience
Lenny	Male	Caucasian	Ed.S.	21
Brennen	Male	African American	Ed.D.	4
Barry	Male	African American	M.Ed.	11
Lewis	Male	Caucasian	M.Ed.	5
Pete	Male	African American	Ed.S.	17
Paul	Male	Caucasian	M.Ed.	12
Sky	Female	Caucasian	Ed.S.	10
Sarah	Female	Caucasian	Ed.D.	9
Turner	Male	African American	Ed.S.	7
Carol	Female	African American	Ed.D.	5

Relationships

Among the participants a strong consensus emerged regarding relationships and the positive influence relationships have on improved graduation rates. Caring, listening, meeting the needs of students, communicating, and trusting are all sub-themes emerged out of the grand theme, building relationships. Sub-themes play a critical role in developing relationships with students according to participants. Lewis stated:

In order for me to help a student graduate and continue being successful I must have a relationship with a student so they will trust me, that student must know that I am personally invested in their well-being, they must know I care.

Brennen commented "coming to school every day without relationships would be like working with a bunch of strangers, no one trusts a stranger, especially students." Sky asked "How do we get students to listen to us and trust we have their best interest at heart if we don't communicate and have a strong relationship with them? It's impossible." Lenny stated "we must have relationships with our students if we want them to truly be successful." Barry added "We must care about the whole child, that means helping them, taking care of them, finding out what their needs are and then finding a way to meet those things."

Caring/Meeting the Needs of Students

As related to the sub-themes of caring and meeting the needs of students, Pete stated "kids don't care what you know until they know how much you care." Similarly, Brennen said "students must first know you care about them as a person before they will ever listen to what you want them to do." Carol commented "instructions without care and concern for the person is (*sic*) simply wasted words flying in the air." Brennen, Pete,

and Paul summarized that students must feel they matter as a person not just a number on some standardized test reflecting whether or not the school they attend is being effective.

Pete also stated "caring for students and teachers is critical in all of them being successful." "Students must know they are not only cared for but cared about outside of the school" stated Turner, "students must leave school knowing they are far more than just between 8 (a.m.) and 3 (p. m.)." Lewis explained "when looking at students we must see a face and a name as they are our own children. When we do this a new level of care and concern for the student's welfare and well-being emerge and take over."

Similarly, Paul spoke about taking the time to find out the needs of the students and their families. "Many times what students are lacking will explain to us the reasoning for their lack of success at school." Paul also stated:

> Getting to know the home situation and family situation tells the principal a lot about the child. It takes time to sit down and get to know your students but if we are to have depth in our relationships with them we must find out their needs and wants which in turn shows concern and care for the student, building a factor of trust.

Listening/Communicating

Listening and communicating are sub-themes emerged that comprise the grand theme of building relationships. The questioned was asked, how do students know we care about them? Sky responded "when we take the time to listen to our students they really know they matter and are valued." With regard to listening to students, Turner stated:

> It is really hard sometimes to stop and take a minute to listen to what's going on with our students because of the task-oriented days most of keep, but in saying

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that we must find ways to show our students we care about what they have to say

and stop and listen to them.

Brennen said, "I try to speak to every person I pass in the hall ways at school. I want the

students most of all to feel free to talk with me whenever or wherever." "When students

feel they can come to me about anything then I know I have really opened the door for

that student to be successful in many ways," said Pete. Carol stated "communication is

the key in a school being successful. I must communicate with my teachers in a way that

provided them the confidence to communicate with their students in the same way."

Lenny put it best, "communication allows everyone to be on the same page and unified".

According to Paul and Turner, when the school is unified we are providing the

best opportunities for success for our students, no hidden agendas." Carol said "it is also

important we communicate with our parents and school communities." Lewis and Sarah

stated similar views; parents must know what is going on with their kids at school

whether good or bad. This builds relationships with parents and students and opens the

door for conversations creating trust that the school cares about their kid.

Trusting

Trusting as a sub-theme emerged from the grand theme of building relationships.

Sky said, "Students trust you because you listen." Throughout this research study a strong

consensus emerged regarding building relationships and its influence on improved

graduation rates. Participating principals stated trust was the most critical component in a

relationship especially when dealing with students.

Barry said, "Trust is like building a solid brick wall, but when trust is broken the

wall all comes down at once and it's like building the brick wall over one brick at a

time." In other words, trust takes a long time to build but a short time to destroy and an even longer time to restore. Sarah stated, "Trust is built by the product of living and breathing on a daily basis with nothing to hide." This research study revealed that trust was a combination of effort and time from all parties involved. Sky acknowledged "trust is hard to build with all students. Not all students want that relationship with you and not all are so easy just to trust you because of the many times they have been hurt by someone else." "Trust takes time and careful attention to the needs of all students," said Turner. Lenny stated "you must be careful to treat everyone fair and just because students are always watching to see your response. It's hard to build that trust but one slip or mess up can destroy it quickly."

Relationships are just one important piece of the puzzle of how principal leadership influences improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama. Participants noted that they felt relationships played a key role in the success of students. When principals establish, build, and create relationships with students and teachers, students have better results, as in this case higher graduation rates. Healthy relationships help drive success not only in students but also in the overall school and community.

A strong consensus was developed throughout this research study concerning the importance of building relationships. Relationships are important; how one builds them is equally important. Caring, meeting the needs of students, listening, communicating, and trusting were all equally important and carry equal weight in building a strong relationship with others. The remainder of this chapter provides additional information

regarding the importance of building relationships as related to building a culture of expectations for students.

Culture of Expectations

Building a culture of expectations seemed to be consistent throughout this research study. Culture of expectations, according to the participants, was critical to improving graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama. High principal efficacy, creating vision, value, one-on-one goal setting; and mentor relationship tracking students are all sub-themes emerged out of the grand theme, building a culture of expectations.

Barry stated, "Building a culture expecting students to graduate is critical in their success." "Students need and should know what's expected of them soon as they enter their high school years," said Turner. "Creating a culture of success plays an important part in the success of the overall school," stated Sarah. Participating principals agreed having a culture of expectations set the bar and established standards for students to meet. When students do not know the expectations set for them they will mostly fall short many times according to Carol. Lewis stated, "Culture is the way we do things on a regular basis and what things we accept and what thing we don't except." "Students want to be successful and if the culture expresses success by graduating from high school then most will do what they can in order to meet that standard," said Paul.

Also, there was consensus among the participants that culture affected both the school as well as the community as a whole. Building and maintaining a culture of expectations was seen as vital in improving graduation rates, according to the participants of this research study.

High Principal Efficacy

According to Brennen, "a principal must believe he or she can make a difference and create an atmosphere that is positive in regards to all students can learn, therefore being successful." Similarly speaking, Pete and Sky stated that all students can learn. "It is the sole purpose of the principal to create a culture and belief that each student can accomplish the goal of graduating." If the principal is the instructional leader of the school and they don't lead with the confidence of breeding success among all what good are they?" asked Sarah.

There was also consensus among participants that the principal has the sole responsibility of making his or her individual school effective in all aspects. If the principal does not feel they can accomplish this goal, what good are they as a leader? Barry stated, "The principal that doesn't exhibit confidence and belief in their vision is useless as a leader of men and women." It is difficult to lead people when the leader does not believe in him or herself. It is obvious to others when there is a lack of confidence in the leader. It looks as if the principal is uncertain and when uncertainty is present, confusion becomes the leader rather than the principal, according to Paul.

Creating Vision, Value

According to Turner, in order to create vision and value of an education for students, the principal must model the expected behavior. The principal must be a lifelong learner just as the students are learning. Turner also stated that there is a trickledown effect on teachers then students. "If the principal creates an attitude of always learning with the teachers, teachers in turn express the importance of continuing to always be a learner to the students," said Carol. "In order to create vision the principal must communicate clear, specific ideas along with setting firm expectations for

everyone," stated Brennen. Barry stated, "Trust is a key element in creating vision for others. People must first trust you in order to believe [that] what you are saying is in their best interest to help them be successful."

Principals can create value of education in students by communicating the importance and expressing education is the key to success in any situation," stated Lewis. Similarly, Lenny stated, "students will only value their education when they understand how it can benefit them." Brennen said "students must also know and understand the consequences involved with not getting a proper education, a high school diploma." "You create vision and value in students by explaining the pros and cons that are associated with graduating and not graduating," stated Sky. Participants of this research study have commonly stated vision is created by seeing the big picture from beginning to end. A leader must always begin with the end in mind. Paul said, "Creating vision means we have a plan and a blue print to follow and if we follow it these are the things we can accomplish."

One-on-One Goal-Setting/Buy-In

There was consensus among participants that one-on-one goal-setting meetings was one way to achieve buy-in from most students Participants stated that students need a plan. Planning should include input from students addressing their needs and personal goals. An in-depth explanation of where they are and where they are going should be communicated thoroughly with the student. Lewis stated, "buy-in only comes when communication is at the highest level with the student. It is crucial for the student to understand all the components of what it takes to be a successful graduate." Goal-setting meetings, according to Barry, should include the student's data, goals based on the data,

and steps to follow in order to accomplish these goals. Brennen stated, "goal-setting meetings should have follow-up meetings every nine weeks to ensure goals and steps are being accomplished along the way." Main goal-setting meetings should occur at the beginning of each semester in order to make sure the necessary steps are in the plan for continuous improvement in order to meet the specified goals of the student. "Meetings should start when students enter the ninth grade," said Carol.

Participants suggested that these meetings should include parents or important family members who play an important role in the student's success. Including parents and other important family members helps hold students accountable along with creating buy-in from the entire group associated with the student. Communicating these goals to everyone involved ensures clarity, togetherness, and most of all family buy-in for the student's success.

Mentor/Track Students

According to participants, high school students need a mentor. Students need someone they can specifically go to and depend on outside of their home. Mentors provide students an advocate within the school. Creating individual advocates (mentors) within the school provides support and builds student confidence. Having goal-setting meetings with teachers and/or administrators allows this opportunity to be created for the student.

Participants stated mentors for high school students are like lifelines throughout high school. Additionally, the mentor relationship allows the student someone to confide in and talk to, someone to listen, and most of all someone to hold them accountable when

things get tough. Mentors can be an advocate and someone who is on their side. It is easy at times for high school students to get lost in the shuffle and get left behind.

Participants discussed the importance of a mentor for students. Mentor relationships allow a teacher or administrator to track student progress all the way through high school and ensure that goals are being met along with new goals being established for future growth and success. Participants stated that tracking student progress periodically throughout the school year and throughout all high school years frequently keeps students from falling through the cracks, therefore improving graduation rates.

Summary of Findings

Findings of this research study have shed light on how principal leadership influences improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama. Based on semi-structured interview results, it was evident that principals influenced improved graduation rates by being effective in their daily practices of building relationships along with building a culture of expectations. Chapter 4 illustrated the importance of building strong relationships and the interconnectedness of building a strong culture of expectations.

In order to build and maintain a culture of expectations for students, students must be able to trust principals. Students must understand and have confidence that principals care about their success as a person not just as another student. Participants communicated that students need to be heard and communicated with not just communicated to. Students want to feel important, and they matter. Meeting student needs along the way helps establish this feeling among students.

When needs are met it shows that principals care and have concern about them as a person. Relationships are integral to building a culture of expectations. Without relationships students simply see programs as a waste of time because there is no investment between the student and administrator.

In order for students to believe principals, they must believe first and foremost that the plan in front of them will bring success. Creating vision and value helps students take ownership of their own education and success. All of the themes in this study were linked to one another and designed to help students succeed.

Chapter 5

Summary and Discussion

Greater expectations have been placed on principals to improve graduation rates of high school seniors. Principal leadership plays an important role in positively influencing graduation rates of students. Multiple researchers have noted that principal leadership makes a difference and can positively affect student achievement (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Hallinger, 2005; Santoyo, 2012; Zepeda, 2013). In fact, Marzano et al. (2014) argued that principals have a primary responsibility to improve student achievement. In high schools today, student achievement is measured in terms of overall graduation rate of high school seniors.

According to Zepeda (2013), principals are expected to create and support the necessary conditions for improving student achievement. Increasing higher expectations calls for greater accountability and therefore has led to principals assuming a greater degree of responsibility for student achievement. In other words, principals are under increased pressure to ensure that graduation rates continue to rise.

With high school graduation rates as the new measure for high school success, principals must be equipped with the necessary skill sets in order to improve graduation rates of high school seniors. As previously stated, principal leadership is one of the most significant factors affecting student achievement (Santoyo, 2012). In order to have the greatest impact, principals must have a thorough understanding of the skills and behaviors needed to be an effective leader. Layton (2014) argued that ultimately it is the principal who is accountable for student achievement.

According to Dufour and Marzano (2011), principal leadership and student achievement are significantly and positively associated with one another. Therefore the purpose of this study was to explore how principal leadership influenced the phenomenon of improved sub-par graduation rates of urban high schools in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama. Researching principal leadership provided insights and access to the perspectives and experiences of 10 principals who were leading urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama at the time of this study. Participating principals met the necessary criteria as established by the researcher. Subsequently, this research of principal leadership provides in-depth knowledge of current principal practices that have led to improved graduation rates.

An exploration of the leadership practices of these 10 principals currently leading an urban high school in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama who have seen improvements in graduation rates may provide practicing principals new insights and resources from which to draw. Qualitative research methods were used to conduct this phenomenological study.

Descriptions of the phenomenon were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Interviews provided insights of participant perspectives and experiences in terms of improved graduation rates in urban high schools. Data analysis uncovered two major themes and nine subthemes. Chapter 5 presents findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendation for further studies.

Summary of Major Findings

Findings of this qualitative study represent the perspectives and experiences of 10 principals who were leading urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama at the time of this study. Participants had also seen improvements

in graduation rates over the previous three years. Research questions and sub-questions were used in semi-structured interviews to explore participant perspectives and experiences regarding the phenomenon of principal leadership and its positive influences on sub-par graduation rates in urban high schools.

Principals shared their personal perspectives and experiences of the best leadership practices that influenced improved graduation rates in their current urban high schools. Principal perspectives were captured regarding the influence of principal leadership on improved graduation rates in urban high schools. Based on participant interviews and quotes throughout this research study, two major, overarching themes emerged from the data: building relationships, and building a culture of expectations.

Building relationships was a primary theme. Participants identified different aspects of relationships which were recorded as the following sub-themes: caring, meeting the needs of students, listening, communicating, and trusting in the students and teachers. In terms of building a culture of expectations, the following sub-themes emerged: high principal efficacy, creating vision and value, one-on-one goal setting/buy-in, and mentoring and tracking students. Participants discussed common themes throughout this phenomenological study lending additional evidence to how principal leadership influences improved sub-par graduation rates in urban high schools.

Basic findings of this research study showcased overlapping themes that were frequently and inextricably intertwined. Effective school leaders know the importance of aligning all of the parts of their organization to increase student achievement (Zepeda, 2013). General consensus among researchers that the overall system of school leadership has failed to consider contextual, moral, and ethical issues in decision-making processes

(Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Marzano & Dufour, 2011; Marzano et al., 2014; Santoyo, 2012; Zepeda, 2013).

Study participants expressed a firm belief that caring, meeting the needs of students, listening, and communicating well were all characteristics of leadership behaviors that led to strong relationships of trust. Participants noted that these relationships, in turn, positively influenced graduation rates. Marzano et al. (2014) affirmed in over 35 years of research, these leadership behaviors have had positive effects on student achievement.

Johnson (2012) and Northouse (2012) concurred with the conclusions of Marzano et al. (2014) by identifying leadership behaviors that placed a renewed focus on the ability of school leaders to positively affect student achievement. Findings from this current study demonstrate a strong connection between these leadership behaviors and improved graduation rates.

One of the first identified behaviors by participants in this current study was compassion. Dufour and Marzano (2011) explained that compassion is a behavior rooted in hardship and suffering. Principals must be able to show compassion. Hardship teaches leaders to have compassion for others during their time of suffering. Compassion for others frequently comes from leaders who have personally experienced emotional pain and suffering in the past.

In school settings, effective principals extend compassion to students as well as faculty and staff members. Morris (1999) described caring as both natural and ethical; Bass (1985) noted that all dimensions of effective leadership are positively related to caring. According to Morris (1999), caring emphasizes responsibility and relationships

and requires the ability to actively listen and carefully make decisions with the goals of affirming and encouraging the best in others.

Johnson (2012) stated effective leaders are good communicators. Communicators listen to both the words and the emotions of what people are saying. Effective leaders have the ability to express themselves in the most appropriate ways and to build relationships with others. Generally, they also possess the quality of being active listeners. According to Spiro (2013), effective administrators show they care about the people in their building by listening to them both informally and intently. Effective leaders listen with an intention to hear parents, teachers, and students (Johnson, 2012). If student achievement is related to effective leadership, then the skills to communicate and listen are vitally important (Northouse, 2012).

Principal leadership has developed and expanded from simply thinking about "what I do" to considering "why I do" (Zepeda, 2013). If educators only focus on the what, then they fail to see the real purpose of education. Education is about student learning and student goal achievement (Poole, 1994). Students learn best when they are guided by educators with whom they have built a relationship of trust (Johnson, 2012).

According to Johnson (2012), if we want our teachers to become educators our students can trust, then we must foster an environment of mutual trust. Principals who are trustworthy are consistent in their behaviors. When things become inconsistent and dishonest, a state of apathy sets in among the group. Once trust is broken, student performance and achievement suffers. Principals should build and grow trust daily.

In this current study, participants indicated that high principal efficacy was nurtured through creating vision and value, setting one-on-one goals, and mentoring and

tracking students. Researchers have suggested that these are all leadership behaviors that lead to a strong culture of expectations, which in turn influences graduation rates in a positive direction.

Bandura (1979) stated principal self-efficacy is like an individual's judgment of their capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school they lead. McCollum and Kajs (2009) further described self-efficacy as an important construct in developing educational leaders. According to the authors, self-efficacy is connected to success in learning and success in work. Bandura (1997) proposed that self-efficacy beliefs influence the level of effort and persistence principals put forth in their work as well as their resilience in the face of setbacks.

Principals must believe in their own thoughts and ideas in order to create vision and buy-in within the school. According to study participants, being an effective administrator is largely connected to having a strong mastery goal orientation. Leithwood et al. (2004) stated there is a significantly positive relationship between principal leadership and student outcomes operating indirectly through certain school conditions.

Bandura (1997) explained that a principal's self-efficacy beliefs have a significant impact on his or her level of aspiration and goal setting, effort, adaptability, and persistence. McCollum and Kajs (2009) observed a clear relationship between a school administrator's sense of efficacy and his or her goal orientation. Bouchamma et al. (2014) demonstrated that principals who were highly effective spent more time developing instructional goals and expended a greater amount of energy for longer periods of time ensuring buy-in, while also bouncing back from failure more quickly in the face of adversity.

Principals with high levels of efficacy have a greater outcome expectancy to effectively facilitate value in teaching and learning at their respective schools which in turn leads to increases in student achievement (Bandura, 1997). Smith et al. (2006) suggested that urban high schools, which are primarily comprised of students from high poverty areas, would greatly benefit from principals with high levels of efficacy in instructional leadership.

Finally, study participants advocated the importance of mentoring and tracking students along their high school journey. Participants regarded this strategy as having great value in increasing graduation rates among their students. Mentoring and tracking students may be one area of focus for future research studies since limited studies on this topic currently exist.

Emergent themes from this research investigation provide evidence of the influence of principal leadership with respect to improved graduation rates in urban high schools. Participating principals spoke of the importance and impact of these themes and how strategies worked together to improve graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama.

Research Questions

Ten principals who were currently leading an urban high school in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama participated in this research study. Principal perspectives and experiences were explored as related to improved graduation rates. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to address specific research questions and sub-questions. The central research question was: "How does principal leadership

influence graduation rates in urban high school in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama?"

Sub-questions for this research study included the following:

1. What leadership practices do principals most utilize in initiating change in regards to improved graduation rates?

2. What leadership behaviors do principals most utilize in improving graduation rates?

3. How does the role of the principal influence students graduating?

Research Questions Answered

Sub-Question One

Sub-question one explored the leadership practices principals most utilized in initiating changes to improve graduation rates. There was a great deal of consensus among participating principals regarding leadership practices. Principals described the importance of having high principal efficacy before any practice could be implemented.

According to Federici and Shaalvik (2012), principals without high efficacy perceived an inability to control the environment. Federici and Shaalvik (2012) further noted that principals with low efficacy were less likely to hold themselves accountable for student achievement. Bandura (1997) explained that a principal's efficacy beliefs have a significant impact on his or her level of aspiration and goal setting, effort, adaptability, and persistence. McCollum and Kajs (2009) detected a clear relationship between school administrator efficacy and school administrator goal orientation.

Similarly, Bouchamma et al. (2014) demonstrated that principals who were highly efficacious spent more time addressing instructional concerns and expended a greater

amount of energy for longer periods of time. Based on these previous findings, it is clear that principal efficacy is critical to the process of implementing leadership practices and for these practices to lead to improvements in student achievement. Principals also emphasized the importance of buy-in from stakeholders within the school in order for leadership practices to become effective. Principals must believe in themselves and their leadership practices for others to be confident in improvement strategies.

Principals described how successful leadership practices when implemented together worked to improve graduation rates among urban high schools students. Principals stated the importance of one-on-one goal-setting meetings with parents, students, and mentoring teachers. Goal-setting meetings with all stakeholders in the life of the student created vision, value, and buy-in which was necessary for success to occur. Principals explained the importance of all stakeholders knowing the plan of action.

One of the primary observations from this research was that students needed to see the plan in black and white in order to successfully and fully understand the expectations that others had for them. With all stakeholders present in the meeting, a consistent standard of accountability is established within the group. Once this standard is in place, the principal and other leaders can track and mentor students throughout high school and onto graduation.

Sub-Question Two

Sub-question two explored the leadership behaviors principals most utilized in improving graduation rates. Once again, study participants expressed consensus regarding this topic. Marzano et al. (2014) articulated leadership behaviors for school administrators that have been shown to positively influence student achievement.

Johnson (2012) and Northouse (2012) both concurred with Marzano and colleagues by identifying specific leadership behaviors which consistently lead to improvements in student achievement. Principals in this study identified many of the same leadership behaviors as discussed by Marzano (2014), Johnson (2012), and Northouse (2012).

Principals explained how showing compassion/caring, meeting students' needs, listening, and communicating as leadership behaviors influenced improved graduation rates among urban high school students. Principals noted that these leadership behaviors were introduced to students during one-on-one goal-setting meetings with teachers or administrators. Further, participants suggested that these leadership behaviors would continue to grow and become more effective as the relationship with the student developed over time.

According to these principals, when leadership behaviors were present over a period of time with students, a foundation of trust was established within the relationship. Participants suggested that the most critical leadership behavior in terms of improved graduation rates was trust.

Many urban high school students lack the parental, home, and outside support necessary to be successful in school. If students do not receive support within the school itself, they face a higher risk of not graduating. Moreover, if students cannot trust the guidance and leadership they are provided at school, they will fall to the wayside as another casualty to "the system". Students do best when they are guided by educators with whom they have built a relationship of trust (Johnson, 2012).

Sub-Question Three

Sub-question three explored the ways in which the role of the principal influenced improved graduation rates. Principals participating in this research study described the

principal's role as consequential in terms of student graduation. All 10 principals emphasized the importance of the principal's role as related to urban high school students graduating.

Zepeda (2013) showed that the principal's role had grown into an instructional role focused on teaching and learning among students. Santoyo (2012) suggested the principal's role resembled a new model which was concentrated on instruction and learning as well as the overall educational process. As such, the principal's leadership role has become a function of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of instruction (Zepeda, 2013). Santoyo (2012) noted that this role of instructional leader typically results in better instruction, improved student learning, and higher levels of student achievement.

Throughout the interviews, principals expressed a great deal of concern regarding students actually graduating from high school. Based on previous research findings, the principal has a great deal of influence in terms of student achievement. Study participants explained that their success as a principal and high school student success meant graduating from high school.

Principals stated it was important for them to set the standard of expectations as early as the ninth grade for students. Additionally, a number of participants found that it was important for the principal to personally hold students academically accountable. Participating principals concisely stated that the overall goal for all principals should be for all students to graduate with their peers. According to these participants, student graduation not only signals success for the principal, but it opens the doors to many more

opportunities for students to experience growth, success, and the chance to become a

productive citizens.

Poole (1994) stated education should be about student learning and student goal

achievement. Zepeda (2013) stated it best: principal leadership should be about not what I

do but rather why I do. If educators focus on the what, rather than the why, then they fail

to see the real purpose of education.

Summary of Questions Answered

A qualitative research design was used for this research study, and the tradition of

inquiry was phenomenology. Ten principals who were currently leading an urban high

school in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama and had seen an

increase in graduation rates in their specific school participated in this research study.

Data and findings from semi-structured interviews were limited to the perspectives and

experiences of the 10 participating principals and should not be generalized beyond the

scope of this investigation.

Findings from this study indicated a high degree of consensus among the 10

participating principals. Participating principals shared common leadership practices,

mutual leadership behaviors, and similar leadership role responsibilities as related to

influencing improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater metropolitan

area of Birmingham, Alabama. Participating principals also expressed individual

perspectives on how principal leadership influenced improved urban high school

graduation rates.

Consensus was established with regard to the importance of building lasting

relationships and building a culture of high expectations. Principal discussions revealed

overarching themes that focused on how principal leadership influenced improved graduation rates in urban high schools. Principals suggested they must first demonstrate high self-efficacy in order to gain buy-in from students and for students to believe that they could be successful in school.

Principals noted the importance of having one-on-one goal-setting meetings to establish and build relationships with students, relationships built on trust. According to these participants, trust is developed over time by showing compassion and caring for students while also meeting their needs. Trust is fostered by listening and communicating with students. Principals stated that once trust was established, a vision could be adopted for reaching goal attainment. Accountability though goal-setting meetings with all stakeholders in students' lives creates a strong relationship and builds a culture of expectations and goal completion. For urban high school students, this goal was communicated as graduation from high school.

Contribution to the Field of Knowledge

As noted in Chapter 2, previous researchers have documented the history of the leadership model and its impact on the evolving role of the principal model (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978; Hallinger, 1992; Glanz, 1998; Kowalski, 2006; Stoghill, 1974; Zepeda, 2013); principal self-efficacy, leadership behaviors and the role of the principal in today's school (Bandura, 1997, Bouchamma, Basque, Marcotte, 2014; Johnson, 2012; Marzano, 2005, 2014); and the responsibility of the principal to positively influence student achievement in today's schools (Santoyo, 2012, Spiro, 2013). The gap in the literature, therefore, is the importance of building a culture of expectations in today's schools, especially within urban high schools. Research findings from this study provide an

important contribution to the field of knowledge of how principal leadership influences improved graduation rates in urban high schools. Building a culture of expectations contributes to the field of knowledge and expands our understanding of school culture.

Culture is what we accept or do not accept. Culture is how and why we do the things we do. In urban high schools, participating principals discussed how they changed the cultures of their schools, starting first with a change in mindset. Changing the collective mindset from an expectation of failure to an expectation of success is a radical departure from many urban school settings.

Students in urban high schools face many challenges, and failure is often seen as the end result regardless of the task at hand. Principals noted that this change in mindset had to start with them first. Students in their schools must know that school leaders believe in them. Participants suggested that once students saw that others believed in their capability to succeed, students could then transcend their previously held beliefs of failure. When students understood that graduating from high school was an expectation they no longer saw failing to graduate as an option.

Cultures shifted in all 10 schools. Expectations of graduating and academic success replaced expectations of academic failure. Over a three-year period these principals saw an overwhelming shift in the mindsets of their students who positively responded to principal expectations for them graduating from high school.

Participating principals saw negative student mindsets erode, replaced by positive affirmation that they could accomplish this goal. Building this culture of expectations to graduate began with principal leadership; individuals promoted the ideals of excellence and success as a way to transform both student lives and the school culture.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings of this research study, along with my own experiences as an urban student, urban teacher, and urban administrator, there are several implications for daily practice. As previously stated, this study contributes to the field of knowledge in terms of building a culture of expectations. Principal leadership plays an integral role in improving graduation rates in urban high schools. Findings of this research study demonstrated how leadership behaviors in building strong relationships were critical to being effective and improving urban high school graduation rates.

There is a clear connection between the literature review and the findings of this study in how principal leadership serves as the single most important factor in improving graduation rates in urban high schools. As reflected in Chapter 2 and the findings of this research study, the interrelated concepts of relationships and expectations positively influence graduation rates. Therefore, one question remains: Why are all principals not implementing and practicing these components on a daily basis?

Participating principals in this research study were all highly motivated individuals, focused on changing the lives and futures of the students attending their schools. Principals who are only working for a paycheck and not working to transform students' lives might find the recommendations of this study to be cumbersome and unwieldy.

Further, principals may not have the necessary leadership to accomplish improved goals in such challenging environments as urban high schools or simply may not care about student efficacy or the effectiveness of their schools. Finally, principals who do not have the requisite life experiences and prior knowledge to make critical decisions to

support low and underachieving students would undoubtedly find the recommendations of this current study to be out of reach. Principals who lack the leadership to realize improvements in student achievement and graduation rates should not be leading our urban high schools.

Districts need to provide more comprehensive evaluations and interventions for principals leading urban high schools. Districts must be more thorough in their decision making processes regarding who to retain and who to terminate. Principals must be able to demonstrate both willingness and ability to lead a school and to accomplish their desired goals.

Principals who fail to make progress must be assigned interventions to allow for growth and improvement; those who continue to struggle despite these interventions must be removed from their leadership positions. Districts must do a better, more thorough job of screening applicants for principal leadership positions in urban high schools. Districts should include scenario-based questions during the interview screening process. Districts need to hire leaders who are qualified and who possess effective principal leadership, as the findings suggest in this study. Implementation of these findings are needed to move low underachieving schools to improved overachieving schools. Our students deserve nothing less.

Implications for the Study

According to participating principals, building relationships and building a culture of expectations play important roles in improving graduation rates in urban high schools. Findings from the research questions provide insights based on perspectives and experiences of participating principals and lead to professional implications for the study.

Participants explained how building relationships and building a culture of expectations through principal leadership had influenced improved graduation rates in their schools. Specifically, principals stated that in order to build relationships the following conditions must be present: compassion, meeting the needs of students, listening, communicating, and trust. Principals also stated that in order to build a culture of expectations additional conditions must be present: high principal efficacy, vision and value, one-on-one goal-setting meetings, and mentoring/tracking students. Based on the findings of these 10 participating principals, professional implications for the study are listed below.

The primary implication seems to be a call for professional development in the areas of building relationships and building cultures of high expectations. Previous research regarding leadership practices and leadership behaviors is situated at the college and university level and in the literature of professional organizations. It would benefit local school districts to collaborate with individuals from institutions of higher education and professional organizations to gain insights that are relevant to best practices for building relationships and building cultures of expectations.

It would also be beneficial for these institutions and professional organizations to provide workshops and seminars on the two topics. Best practices could be shared with local school principals (and subsequently their staff members) by providing training for district level personnel. Principals and district level personnel would need to collaborate to develop an action plan for implementing activities related to building relationships and building a culture of expectations in their local schools based on these best practices.

Second implementation for the study would be for leadership experiences to be shared among colleagues. For example, principals who understand the importance of building relationships and building a culture of expectations, who have implemented leadership practices in their schools, and who have seen increases in graduation rates could become mentors for both new and current principals who may be experiencing the same challenges.

Mentoring of principals needs to occur at all levels including local, district, state, and national levels. It is important that educators model the practices and behaviors that they want their students to effectively implement. If best practices are flowing down from the national and state levels and being shared across districts and towns, then students will begin to see that collaborating and building relationships are highly valued skills. Principals must have the requisite knowledge and skills in order to implement best practices and to be effective administrators in order to improve graduation rates in urban high schools.

In addition to mentoring, principals should also monitor and self-evaluate their own leadership practices and behaviors. Principals need to be aware of how they are operating their schools on a day-to-day basis and ensure that they are utilizing best practices for effective leadership and management. There are several ways to do this including: participating in professional development; reading professional journals; maintaining a daily journal of what worked and what did not work; engaging in self-reflection; being a lifelong learner; enrolling in continuing education classes, and working with a colleague. Not only are these important to consider, but they are imperative to one's growth and maturity as an effective principal.

Once principals have engaged in training and professional development on building relationships and building cultures of expectations, it is appropriate to share lessons learned with assistant principals and teachers. Frequently, training and professional development opportunities are limited to principals. However, to address improvements in graduation rates, it is important for all stakeholders at the local school level who interact with students on a daily basis to have an understanding of how relationships are built and how cultures of expectations are established.

Principals, assistant principals, and teachers must be of one accord when beginning the process of building relationships and building a culture of expectations. Culture must start at the top and permeate the school. For the process to be effective, total buy-in must be present. As previously mentioned, buy-can only occur when the vision is clear and people feel they have ownership in the process.

Recommendations for Future Research

Ten principals participated in this qualitative research study, and these 10 individuals were leading urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama at the time of this study. Findings from this study may provide insights for future research. Future researchers are encouraged to the expand this current study to include more principals who are leading urban high schools outside the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham who have also experienced the same phenomenon of improved graduation rates.

Comparative studies could be conducted with other principals leading urban high schools outside of the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham who have seen increases in graduations rates over the last three to five years. Future researchers may also wish to

consider conducting a study which involves mentoring and tracking of students and its influence alone on improved graduation rates in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama or in other cities, states, and regions.

Conclusions

Urban high schools face a disproportionately low graduation rate of 55% as compared to the national graduation rate of 80% for all high schools (Ehrenfreund, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to Zepeda (2013), there are certain characteristics and behaviors associated with effective principal leadership. Examples of these characteristics and behaviors include: showing compassion; meeting the needs of students; listening, communicating; demonstrating high principal efficacy; and articulating vision, values, and trust. While effective leadership has a direct impact on improving student achievement, these skills are not necessarily taught or supported at the district level (Marzano et al., 2014).

Marzano et al. (2014) identified leadership behaviors and responsibilities that, when implemented consistently, can have a substantial impact on student achievement. Santoyo (2012) observed that a principal's ability to create positive change was directly related to his or her leadership characteristics and behaviors. Marzano et al. (2014) advocated for principals to master behaviors that would guide their efforts in order to improve student achievement and affect positive change.

One of the problems principals face is deciding which characteristic to use to achieve the desired result of improved student achievement. Findings from this research study suggest that all of them play an important role in positively influencing change. Since principals in urban high schools are frequently under pressure to improve graduation rates, they may find the findings of this study to be valuable.

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The topic of graduation rates in urban high schools is an abandoned area of research. Consequently, little to no research is available to better understand the specific framework for improving graduation rates in urban high schools. This paucity of scholarship served as a catalyst for this current research study.

The purpose of this study was to explore how principal leadership influenced the phenomenon of sub-par graduation rates in urban high schools. Compassion, meeting the needs of students, listening, communicating, principal efficacy, vision/value, goal-setting meetings, and mentoring and tracking students were all considered paramount to principal leadership and its ability to influence improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama. As a result of this research study, the researcher recommends local school districts, university programs, and the State Department of Education promote further studies, professional development opportunities, and support systems for principals related to building relationships and building cultures of expectations.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Date

Dear Principal:

My name is Chris Trawick. I am an Assistant Principal at Hueytown Elementary School in Hueytown, Alabama. I am currently in the process of completing the requirements for my doctorate degree (Ed.D) in Educational Leadership at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting involving principal leadership and its influence on graduation rates in urban high schools. The study is entitled, "How does the evolving role of principal leadership, from manager to instructional leader influence graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater metropolitan area of Birmingham, Alabama?" The purpose of this study is to explore the shared experiences of urban high school principals to allow for better understanding of increased graduation rates in urban high schools.

You have been selected for this study based on you serving as a principal at an urban high school that has seen increases in graduation rates. If you agree to participate I will ask you to schedule a 60 minute one on one interview. The interview will be audio-recorded. The audio recorded interviews will be transcribed by a hired transcription service. In the interview I will ask you to assign yourself a pseudonym to help protect your confidentiality. The interview would be best held in your school at the end of the day. If there is need for a follow up interview I will contact you to set up a time.

The information obtained about you and your school for this study will be kept private and confidential. All data collected will be stored in a secured location under lock and key and on a password protected computer. After the research study is completed all data analyzed and all the findings noted will be erased and purged along with all hard copy data will be shredded and disposed of in one location including audio recordings.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and there is no compensation for your time given to this study. You may withdraw at any point during this process. Taking part in this research is not part of your work or duties. You can refuse to enroll, or withdraw after enrolling at any time before the study is over, with no effect on your job.

You may not directly benefit from taking part in this study. However, the findings of this research study may provide ideas for additional professional learning communities for administrators and district leaders that lead to higher graduation rates in urban high schools.

If you have any questions about this research study, or if you would like to schedule an interview please feel free to contact me, Chris Trawick at (205) 471-3447 or by email at chrisaaron24@gmail.com. Also you may contact the IRB at UAB at (205) 934-3789. Thank you in advance for your participation and assisting me with this research study in order to fulfill my doctoral requirements in pursuit of my Ed.D. I look forward to working with you and learning from your experiences.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

1A. What are some leadership practices you are currently using?

1B. Which leadership practices do you feel are the most important in initiating change?

1C. In your experience is one leadership practice more important than the other?

2A. Do you feel leadership behaviors are learned behaviors?

2B. What leadership behaviors seem to be the most effective in improving graduation rates?

3A. How important is increased graduation rates to you as a principal?

3B. Do you as a principal feel you have a direct impact on a student graduating?
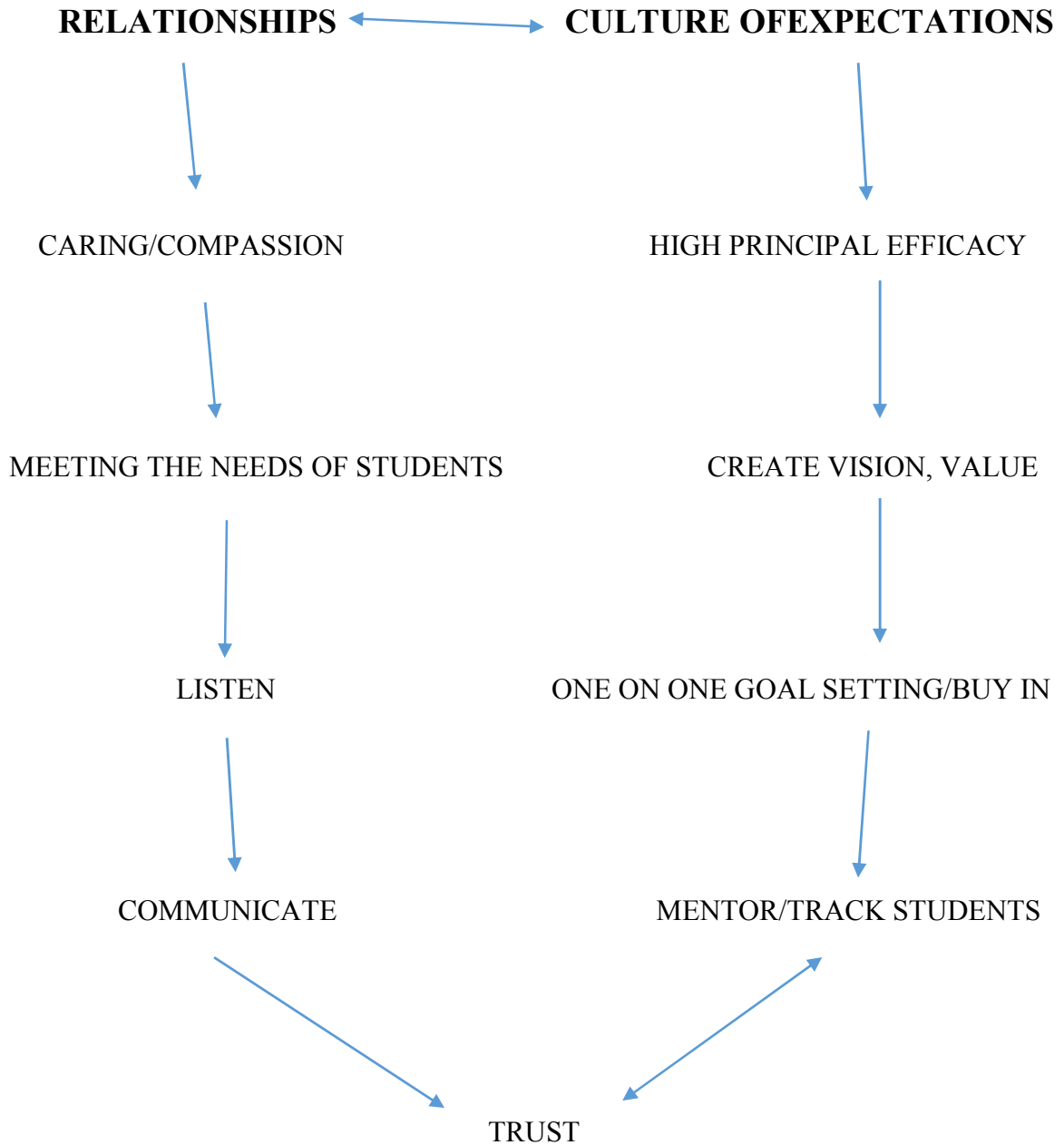
3C. If so, why do you feel as if you do?

APPENDIX C

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES AS REPORTED BY

PARTICIPATING PRINCIPALS

PRINCIPAL	2012 Graduation %	2013 Graduation %	2014 Graduation %	2015 Graduation %
LENNY	36	40	48	72
BRENNEN	51	60	70	80
BARRY	52	54	62	76
LEWIS	46	60	80	83
PETE	50	54	64	72
PAUL	75	78	83	88
SKY	63	70	81	83
SARAH	71	75	83	90
TURNER	59	71	80	89
CAROL	76	83	82	88

APPENDIX D

VISUAL DIAGRAM OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

How does principal leadership influence improved graduation rates in urban high schools in the greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama?

RELATIONSHIPS ←——→ **CULTURE OFEXPECTATIONS**

CARING/COMPASSION   HIGH PRINCIPAL EFFICACY

MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS   CREATE VISION, VALUE

LISTEN   ONE ON ONE GOAL SETTING/BUY IN

COMMUNICATE   MENTOR/TRACK STUDENTS

TRUST

APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Institutional Review Board for Human Use

Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA00005960 and it expires on January 24, 2017. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: TRAWICK, CHRISTOPHER A

Co-Investigator(s):

Protocol Number: **E150618003**

Protocol Title: *How Does the Evolving Role of Principal Leadership, from Manager to Instructional Leader Influence Graduation Rates in Urban High Schools in the Greater Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama?*

The above project was reviewed on __7|6|15__. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This project qualifies as an exemption as defined in 45CF46.101, paragraph____1____.

This project received EXEMPT review.

IRB Approval Date:___7|6|15___

Date IRB Approval Issued:___7|6|15___

Cari Oliver
Assistant Director, Office of the
Institutional Review Board for Human Use
(IRB)

Investigators please note:

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.

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