Vice Principals: Prescription for the Principalship

by

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Vice Principals: Prescription for the Principalship

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to understand how leadership practices of early career and more seasoned principals are informed and influenced by their past experiences as vice principals. The overarching goal: increase understanding of how the work experiences of vice principals can be better leveraged as apprenticeship opportunities for future principals.

A phenomenological research design was utilized. Interviewed participants were asked to indicate which vice principal experiences were directly transferable to current responsibilities as a principal and to describe how these duties inform their current work.

Findings suggest leadership practices of early-career, and highly effective principals were influenced by past experiences as vice principals via pathways to the principalship and through relationships with lead principals. Further, work experiences of vice principals served as training ground for principals, both operationally and instructionally. Identified gaps in leadership training included budget, instructional leadership, special education, and human resources.

Due to the lack of succession management systems, school districts might benefit from succession plans for aspiring leaders. Preadministrative opportunities for teacher leaders ensure positive socialization into administration. Former middle vice principals revealed gaps regarding instructional leadership training, yet elementary vice principals did not. Middle school principals would benefit from additional training, accordingly.

This paper asks current principals to reflect on their former roles and responsibilities as vice principals and describe how those experiences inform their current work as instructional leaders.
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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents,

who always told me to follow my bliss.
CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Through practice, vice principals have an opportunity to develop and display the
skills necessary to lead effective schools (Marshall, Mitchell, & Gross, 1990). However,
the duties and responsibilities traditionally assigned to vice principals, including student
discipline and organizational maintenance, leave many vice principals unable to advance
their leadership capacity as it relates to pedagogical concerns (Marshall & Greenfield,
1987). Vice principals often struggle to fulfill conflicting roles, simultaneously serving
as disciplinarians, student advocates, and teacher supporters (Tanner & Dennard, 1995;
Tredway, Brill, & Hernandez, 2007). Although they are both student and teacher
focused, their duties pertain largely to the operational, as opposed to the curricular,
aspects of school life (Reed & Himmler, 1985). Faced with a growing shortage of
qualified principal applicants (Peters, 2011), school districts could benefit from providing
vice principals with substantive experience in all aspects of the principal’s role, including
both operational and instructional responsibilities.

Current research reveals that vice principals’ conception of their current role
influences their initial socialization into a new community of practice when they
subsequently become principals (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cantwell, 1993; Crow, 2006;
Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Fink & Brayman, 2006). This process of professional
socialization unfolds early on as principals experience opportunities to engage in
leadership activities (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Moreover, beginning principals’
socialization begins when they are teachers and “develop instructional orientation,
understanding of the nature of knowledge, culture sensitivity to students, and their
conceptions of instructional leadership” (Crow, 2006, p. 317).
Statement of the Problem

Although vice principals encounter challenging roles and responsibilities while assisting school administrators, the degree to which (and in what manner) those experiences inform their future work as lead principals varies. Recent research has focused on identifying and defining vice principal roles and responsibilities based on vice principals’ perspectives. Across studies, vice principals report that operational functions and student discipline remain key components of their jobs (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cantwell, 1993; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Glanz, 1994; Hargreaves, 2005; Hart, 1991; Kwan, 2009a; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Marshall, 1985; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987; Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011; Peters, 2011; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Shoho, Barnett, & Tooms, 2012; Sun, 2012). Given these findings, one might conclude that vice principals gain scant experience with responsibilities that involve instructional leadership, even though those functions have become essential to the work of lead principals in the 21st century. Still, few researchers have asked principals to recount their previous experiences in light of their current role. This study shifts the focus to 21st-century principals who have been asked to reflect on their former roles and responsibilities as vice principals and to describe how those experiences inform their current work as instructional leaders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the duties assumed by vice principals serve as effectual “stepping-stones” to the principalship (Marshall, Mitchell, Gross, & Scott, 1992, p. 80). Shoho and Barnett (2010) stated, “[Novice] principals are influenced by earlier personal, social, and professional experiences, which affect their job expectations and their perceived capabilities to succeed as principals” (p. 565).
Building on recent research that confirms the relationship between the experiences of aspiring leaders and their readiness to become school principals (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cantwell, 1993; Glanz, 1994; Hart, 1991; Kwan, 2009a; Marshall, 1985; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987; Peters, 2011; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Shoho et al., 2012; Spady, 1985), this study sought to determine how previous vice principal duties inform and influence the current leadership practices of highly effective principals. In addition, the goal was to increase understanding of how the work and experiences of vice principals can be better leveraged as apprentice opportunities for future principals.

**Summary of Relevant Research and Scholarship**

Over the past 30 years, many scholars (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cantwell, 1993; Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hart, 1991; Marshall, 1985; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987; Reed & Himmler, 1985) have examined the socialization process of vice principals as they advance to principalships. Hart (1991) stated professional socialization “teaches a person the skills, knowledge, and disposition needed to be a member of the profession” (p. 52). Additionally, Marshall and Greenfield (1987) differentiated between custodial and innovative orientation as they relate to the role of vice principal. The former represents a maintenance type of leadership, while the latter refers to leadership in which one makes conscious decisions to improve teaching and learning. Alongside socialization, stands enculturation. Marshall (1985) described enculturation as the process by which “individuals learn how to fill the norms, interact with the right people, and have the appropriate attitudes so that they are seen as competent and trusted members of the administrative group” (p. 33). Together,
socialization and enculturation greatly influence the success of a vice principal as he or she moves into a principalship.

During the past decade, the role of vice principal has expanded to include instructional leadership responsibilities. Nonetheless, much of a vice principal’s day is still consumed by operational duties (Glanz, 1994; Kwan, 2009a; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Spady, 1985; Sun, 2012). According to Kwan (2009a), educational reforms that focus on improving instruction have resulted in a shift from operational to instructional responsibilities. However, misalignment persists between the ideal roles and responsibilities vice principals consider important and the actual tasks that often consume their days (Kwan & Walker, 2012). Although aspects of the role of vice principal may be elusive, it is clear that the position is a stepping-stone to that of principal. There is a growing body of research and scholarship that pertains to principal succession (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Hart, 1991; Meyer, Macmillan, & Northfield, 2011; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985; Peters, 2011; Shoho et al., 2012).

According to Fink and Brayman (2006), “The rapid and sometimes repeated transitions from one principal to another affect the culture and commitment of school staff and the capacity of schools to achieve and sustain lasting improvement” (p. 67). Likewise, Peters (2011) stated, “Succession is a dynamic process involving the actions of leadership forecasting, creating leadership sustainability and succession planning” (p. 66). She further contended, “Most school districts do not incorporate succession planning into an overall school improvement plan” (p. 82). In fact, Myung et al. (2011) classified leadership promotions as three categories: self-selection, selection based on leadership competencies, and selection based on characteristics not necessarily related to leadership
effectiveness. They identified “tapping” as a management system in which vice principals are encouraged to become principals. Tapping builds leadership capacity from within a school. On the other hand, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) assert that planned leadership succession is the responsible way for school districts to create sustainable leadership. Schmidt-Davis (2011) developed a report for the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB); it recognized that schools require effective principal leaders and that succession planning “puts districts in charge of events and in charge of its future” (p. 1). He challenged districts to develop effect succession plans in an effort to identify internal candidates for principalships “who have been groomed and developed over several years so that they are ready for the job immediately” (p. 1). Further, he stated that the “best mentors for school leaders [vice principals] are successful current and former principals” (p. 26). Therefore, it behooves school districts to develop “fluid” (Peters, 2011, p. 82) succession plans that not only fill vacant positions but also ensure “qualified candidates are provided tools to walk into the principalship with confidence” (Peters, 2011, p. 79).

Although the role of principal is complex and demanding (Cheung & Walker, 2006; Crow, 2006; Quong, 2006), most vice principals aspire to become principals. The position of vice principal is considered a stepping-stone to a principalship. Research indicates that some vice principals believe their experiences (building a school culture, communicating with stakeholders, supervising curriculum, developing professionally, and understanding the daily operations of a school) have prepared them for a principalship (Cheung & Walker, 2006; Crow, 2006; Quong, 2006). However, research reveals recurring gaps in vice principals’ knowledge of budgetary issues, instructional leadership,
and allocation of resources. Despite the challenges they face as principals, some upwardly mobile vice principals continue to seek principalships. They actively engage in collegial networks, participate in professional organizations, and maintain relationships with influential sponsors; however, others instead become career vice principals, return to the classroom as teachers, or are denied promotion and become highly frustrated (Crow, 2006). Retelle (2010) found that there are both facilitators for and barriers to vice principals being promoted to principalships. She indicated facilitators include mentoring and training for the position, visibility among key district leaders, networking within professional organizations, and self-advocacy. According to Retelle, barriers are the “mirror opposite” of facilitators (p. 12). Additionally, vice principals who are qualified to be principals may not be promoted because of those barriers. Despite such challenges, many vice principals maintain a desire for principalship. As vice principals grow in leadership positions, principals and districts play a pivotal role by providing mentoring, training, and professional development opportunities. There is a dearth of research related to professional development for vice principals (Retelle, 2010). Conversely, much research has reviewed professional development for new principals (Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2012; Honig, 2012; Kwan, 2009a; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Mangin, 2007; Retelle, 2010). According to Kwan (2009b), the “rising tide” (p. 203) of educational reforms and school-based initiatives spread responsibility for school accountability across all stakeholders, including vice principals. School leadership is “too demanding for one person” (Gorton, 1987, p. 1). Honig (2012) found that Instructional Leadership Directors (ILDs) have facilitated positive, supportive partnerships between the central office and affiliated schools.
Communication between district supervisors and school leadership teams is key to improving classroom instruction (Mangin, 2007). Mangin (2007) likened the relationship between principals and the district supervisor to that between principal and teacher. She found that if district supervisors supported principal leadership, principals in turn supported teacher leadership. Risking an assumptive leap, this researcher suggests that shared leadership experiences in some schools prepare vice principals for a smooth transition to principalships. In those schools, “principal makers” encourage vice principals to meet with ILDs, communicate expectations for instructional improvement among teachers, and participate in reform initiatives. There are clear indicators school districts would benefit from encouraging district supervisors and principals to include vice principals in leadership-focused professional development opportunities so as to build leadership capacity.

**Research Design and Methodology**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how the leadership practices of highly effective principals are informed and influenced by their past experiences as vice principals. Literature reviewed acknowledges the roles and responsibilities vice principals maintain as they build the necessary skills and practices to move into principalships. The researcher sought comprehensive understanding of how the role of vice principal serves to prepare one for a principalship. In this study, the researcher adhered to the characteristics of qualitative research put forth by Plano Clark and Creswell (2009). Doing so involved utilizing interviewing techniques for data collection to answer the overarching research question: How are the leadership practices
of highly effective principals informed and influenced by their past experiences as vice principals?

Through qualitative data-gathering and analyzing methods, the researcher attempted to identify, understand, and analyze “the underlying meaning of the statements [of research participants] to develop themes about and descriptions of the phenomenon” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009, p. 239). Phenomenological studies are useful when a researcher wants to understand a single phenomenon. “This approach supposes that each individual has unique experiences of a phenomenon” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009, p. 238). The researcher “bracketed” her own knowledge related to the subject so that any personal bias would not “overwhelm the perspectives of the participants” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009, p. 287).

The researcher sought to determine how the duties of those who had served previously as vice principals informed and influenced the current leadership practices of early-career and more seasoned principals serving at high-performing schools; the overarching goal was to increase understanding of how the work experiences of vice principals can be better leveraged as apprenticeship opportunities for future principals. Therefore, purposefully selected principals identified as effective, according to a specific set of measurable criteria, participated in a semi-structured interview. Interview questions provided opportunities for principals to compare and contrast their work experiences as vice principals and principals. The participants were asked to describe the job-related duties they fulfilled as vice principals. In addition, each participant was asked to indicate which vice principal experiences were most directly transferable in terms of current responsibilities as a principal and to describe how those duties inform his or her
current work. Participants were selected from the same large, urban southern California school district and were selected using the following criteria:

- Participant served as a vice principal prior to becoming a principal.
- He/she served as a principal for no more than 5 years.
- He/she works within one district in a large urban county in Southern California.
- His/her school has maintained an Academic Performance Index (API)\(^1\) of over 800 for at least 2 years.
- His/her school is closing the achievement gap for subgroups.

Seven of the 12 principals were deemed highly effective, as they had served in their current roles for at least 2 years, maintaining an API score of 800 or higher. Five of the 12 also served as principals of schools earning API scores of 800 or higher, but had only been in their positions for less than 1 year. As early career principals, these leaders had more immediate recall of their experience as vice principals.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Prior to being interviewed, each participant received a written explanation of the intent of the study and were informed as to how the findings would be utilized. All participants were informed of their right to “voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time” (Creswell, 2007, p. 123). Also, a confidentiality agreement and a voluntary consent form was signed by each participant and returned to the researcher. Additionally, each participant was informed that a pseudonym would be used throughout the study to protect his or her identity. The

\(^1\)API is the Academic Performance Index in California, a number between 200 and 1,000 that measures the academic performance and improvement of a school or district. The state’s goal is for all schools and districts to reach an API of 800.
researcher “bracketed” her knowledge of the subject so as to highlight any personal bias in terms of phenomenology (Creswell, 2007, p. 59).

This study will help further an understanding of skills and practices vice principals must adopt to advance into principalships and eventually become highly effective leaders.

Research Questions

The following questions were posed in an effort to reach a better understanding of how vice principal roles and responsibilities prepare potential leaders for a principalship:

- How are the leadership practices of highly effective principals informed and influenced by their past experiences as vice principals?
- How do school districts utilize the vice principal as training ground for principals as instructional leaders?

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted within a single district setting, which limits the extent to which its findings can be generalized to the broader population of school districts. However, the qualitative data compiled will provide a starting point for a deeper understanding of how the role of the vice principal serves as a stepping-stone to a principalship. Furthermore, the study’s results are restricted to the experiences and perceptions of those persons questioned and interviewed at the school level. As a result, findings do not reflect all of those involved in the phenomenon being studied. Also, it must be noted that the researcher served as a vice principal in a middle school at the onset of the study and subsequently became a principal. Therefore, findings may inadvertently include bias.
Significance of Research to Theory, Practice, and Policy

Although there seems to be more research focused on the role of vice principals, there is little research regarding the link between the roles and responsibilities of vice principals as they apply to the principalship. An emerging body of research, as synthesized and critiqued in the literature review that follows, provides evidence that the vice principal plays a significant role in the school setting and also makes a substantial difference in the operation of a school. However, the limited number of studies delineating the career pathway from the position of vice principal to principal signals that there is a missed opportunity for deepening our understanding of the principalship as a training ground for future principal leaders. In theory, a vice principal’s experiences and education should prepare him or her for a principalship. However, because of a nationwide shortage of highly qualified principals (Cantwell, 1993; Hargreaves, 2005), school districts would be wise to develop leadership capacity among vice principals. Understanding how the role of vice principal aligns with the principalship may guide leadership professional development at district and university levels. In addition, identifying the gaps in leadership knowledge and skills from the perspective of principals who were formerly vice principals would simultaneously serve individual leaders, universities’ preparation programs, and school districts as they seek to mediate those gaps.

This study has the potential to advance both theory and practice. The goals for it include helping ensure that qualified leaders step into principalships and adding to the literature that highlights how the experiences of vice principals influence and inform the leadership practices they implement if and when they become principals. Consequently,
this study provides scholars and school districts with insights that relate directly to
instructional development options necessary to expand the leadership practices of vice
principals.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

*Custodial Orientation:* A leader who maintains the status quo of an organization.

*Enculturation:* The process of learning how to fill the norms, interact with the
right people, and have the appropriate attitudes, so that one is seen as a competent and
trusted member of a group (Marshall, 1985).

*Highly Effective Principal:* One who has maintained an API of 800 or more for
2 or more consecutive years, served as a principal for no more than 5 years, and served as
a vice principal prior to becoming a principal, closing the achievement gap.

*Inbound Leadership Knowledge:* The knowledge and skills a new leader brings to
a new position.

*Innovative Orientation:* A leader who creates new opportunities for an
organization to improve.

*Organizational Socialization:* The knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary
to conduct the role in a particular setting (Crow, 2006).

*Outbound Leadership Knowledge:* The knowledge and skills of the outgoing
leader.

*Socialization:* The process of learning and performing a social role (Marshall &
Greenfield, 1987).

*Succession:* The process of replacing key leaders within an organization.
Vice Principal or Assistant Principal: A term used interchangeably in this study that refers to a person who assists the principal and completes duties as assigned by the principal at the site.
CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

Through practice, vice principals have the opportunity to develop and display the knowledge and skills necessary to manage schools effectively (Marshall et al., 1990). However, the duties and responsibilities traditionally assigned to vice principals, including student discipline and organizational maintenance, leave many vice principals unable to advance their leadership capacity as it relates to pedagogical concerns (Marshall et al., 1990). According to Tanner and Dennard (1995), vice principals often struggle to fulfill conflicting roles, including those of disciplinarian, student advocate, and teacher supporter. Although student and teacher focused, those duties are confined largely to the operational, as opposed to the curricular, domain of school life (Reed & Himmler, 1995). Faced with a growing shortage of qualified principal applicants (Peters, 2011), school districts are wise to provide vice principals with substantive experience in all aspects of the principal’s role, including both operational and instructional responsibilities.

This review of literature examines research that relates to the role conception of vice principals and their initial socialization into new communities of practice as principals (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cantwell, 1993; Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Marshall, 1985; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987; Reed & Himmler, 1985). In addition, the review considers research and scholarship that pertains to principal succession (Hargreaves, 2005; Hart, 1991; Meyer et al., 2011; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985; Peters, 2011; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Shoho et al., 2012). Finally, the researcher also examined research that links to district efforts to expand and support the instructional leadership capacity of vice principals (Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2004; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987; Myung et al., 2011; Quong, 2006; Spady, 1985).
Future research might look to highly effective principals to determine the influential links between their roles as vice principals and their current roles as principals. Such a study has the potential to extend our understanding of how the work experience of vice principals can be better leveraged as an apprenticeship opportunity for future principals.

**Socialization—A Definition**

Over the years, scholars of educational leadership have examined the socialization process of vice principals as they move into leadership positions. Data confirm that socialization presents a difficult obstacle. Marshall (1985) described socialization as the process by which participants must “separate from their reference group and form a positive orientation toward the values of the new group” (p. 30). Likewise, Browne-Ferrigno (2003) revealed that the professional growth process includes a “new mind-set,” with role identity changing as one develops understanding of the roles and responsibilities of administration. Additionally, Marshall and Greenfield (1987) described the transition from teacher to vice principal in terms of “culture shock” as a new vice principal separates himself or herself from the “functions of teaching and learning to focus on organizational stability” (p. 49). Vice principals must find “ways to manage calmly, competently, and loyally in their roles while, at the same time, they experience shock over the demands and compromises in administration” (Marshall & Greenfield, 1987, p. 39).

Emphasizing the idea of the barriers that separate vice principals, Marshall (1985) suggested that they must overcome “hurdles” as they learn “to become part of the organizational culture, to fit with the role of school administrator” (p. 33).
In her synthesis of the literature on leader succession and socialization, Hart (1991) distinguished differences between professional and organizational socialization and suggested that professional socialization “teaches a person the skills, knowledge, and disposition needed to be a member of the profession” (p. 52), while organizational socialization “teaches a person knowledge, values, and behaviors required of those filling a role within a particular organization” (p. 52). This distinction expands the definition provided by Marshall and Greenfield (1987) that identified socialization as the “knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavioral orientations acquired in learning and performing that role” (p. 37). Marshall (1985) referred to the socialization process as one of enculturation in which teachers begin to separate themselves from other teachers and to orient themselves to the administrative group.

**Custodial Versus Innovative Socialization Orientation**

Marshall and Greenfield (1987) explored the concept of custodial orientation versus innovative orientation as related to the role of the vice principal. They referenced Greenfield’s (1985) earlier conception of vice principal socialization as “the development of a custodial orientation which maintains and accepts the role as it currently exists” (p. 37). This more conservative stance results from specific “social structures and processes characterizing the role-learning/role-performing situations” (Marshall & Greenfield, 1987, p. 37). In contrast, an innovative orientation results in modifications of the role. According to Marshall and Greenfield, it is unlikely that vice principals who become principals “shed” the custodial orientation because of the social structures and process “shaping the transition to principalship” (p. 37). The job orientation is based on stereotypes, role models, mentors, and sponsors, thus increasing “the likelihood of
conformity toward influential” (Marshall & Greenfield, 1987, p. 38). As vice principals separate from their previous reference group, they enter into new organizational boundaries and experiences in which the new group “checks to see whether the aspirant can conform and adhere to their norms and meet performance expectations” (Marshall, 1985, p. 30). Hart (1991) discussed related notions of collective versus individual socialization among early career principals. An example of collective socialization occurs when new administrators attend site-based training sessions or participate in shared decision-making situations. These situations may cause new administrators to defer to more senior members of the group, thus limiting creativity. Individual socialization requires the administrator to work alone but also promotes innovation and change (Hart, 1991).

Socialization and Enculturation

Researchers have also investigated the enculturation process of vice principals as they enter administration. Marshall (1985) described enculturation as the process by which “individuals learn how to fill the norms, interact with the right people, and have the appropriate attitudes so that they are seen as competent and trusted members of the administrative group” (p. 33). Whereas socialization occurs at the beginning stages upon entering a new group situation, enculturation includes the “essential tasks that confront vice principals and the dilemmas and choices” one faces (Marshall & Greenfield, 1987, p. 39). Marshall (1985) stated that the enculturation process “begins as teachers separate from their normative reference group [other teachers] during anticipatory socialization and form a positive orientation toward the administrative group” (p. 33). Elaborating on the enculturation process, Marshall discussed two compelling reasons why teachers move
into administration. First, teachers may receive signals from administration indicating a
shift in the organizational environment that provides a new openness to them. Myung
et al. (2011) refer to this as “tapping.” Second, teachers may sense “anger” at the status
quo and thus seek new openness, opportunities, and positions so as to have wider
influence over the organization (Marshall, 1985, p. 49). Marshall delineated the
enculturation process as shown in Table 1.

**Factors Influencing Findings Related to Vice Principal Socialization**

Although data reveal that vice principals shared similar socialization experiences,
it is important to note that the perspectives of research participants varied in relation to
their levels of experience in administrative roles. For example, Browne-Ferrigno (2003)
surveyed teachers enrolled in a principal preparation program for those intent on pursuing
administrative credentials. Although the teachers were involved in field experiences that
included shadowing principals, they were not yet administrators. In light of those
circumstances, findings suggested that leadership preparation studies alone “do not help
students [aspiring administrators] to conceptualize the work of principals or to begin the
necessary socialization process” (Brown-Ferrigno, 2003, p. 494). On the other hand, the
included interviews and surveys with individuals who served as vice principals from 2 to
20 years. Responses regarding the effects of socialization varied among novice and
veteran administrators, suggesting that until administrators “separate from their
orientation to teaching and adopt values and orientation of more experienced
Table 1

*The Enculturation Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental tasks</th>
<th>Developmental task example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Deciding to leave teaching</td>
<td>Includes a positive orientation toward the administration. This also may include encouragement from sponsors or mentors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Analyzing the selection process</td>
<td>Reflection on those qualities and personal characteristics of those who hold administrative positions while considering their own skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Maintaining a calm front in face of culture shock</td>
<td>Once the position has been attained, the new administrator realizes that he/she must remain calm, competent, and in control when faced with administrative decisions and constraints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Defining relationships with teachers</td>
<td>With the new role of vice principal comes the responsibility of supervising teachers. This can create a process of separation between teachers and the new administrator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Us versus Them</td>
<td>The separation from the teacher’s group and the teacher’s role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Learning the art of the street-level bureaucrat¹</td>
<td>As a new administrator, the vice principal must implement policies or programs as determined by the district or risk appearing incompetent or insubordinate. The vice principal must develop coping skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Assertively taking areas of responsibility</td>
<td>Understanding that vice principal duties vary and that communication with the principal may be limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Adjusting modes and attitudes for discipline management</td>
<td>Understanding that discipline can be a time consuming role for the vice principal. Not only must he/she discipline students, teachers may require time and management as well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
administrators” their initial experience on the job will include more “safe choices” and a likelihood of following “tried and true procedures” (Marshall & Greenfield, 1987, p. 45).

Marshall and Greenfield (1987) and Marshall (1985) also determined that vice principals/principal relationships strongly influenced the socialization of the vice principal. For example, one vice principal in the study demanded that each meeting with the principal be documented and recorded because she believed the principal had violated her trust in several situations. Another participant expressed concern when he learned that the principal favored one teacher over another because of religious affiliations. In both of these examples, the socialization process of the vice principal depended on the “good will and expertise” of the principal (Marshall, 1985, p. 55). In contrast, two vice principals in the study experienced continuous sponsorship, had administrative mentors, and felt they benefitted from working with senior administrators who provided insights into the administrative culture (Marshall, 1985).

The Role of the Vice Principal

The role of the vice principal was initially operational in nature. In 1985, Reed and Himmler described the position of vice principal as one that:

On one hand, indicates that a school has sufficient size, wealth, and complexity to warrant at least two administrators. On the other hand, the position stands as a public testimony that a school is having problems serious enough to warrant a full-time administrator who serves as a school disciplinarian (p. 59)

Almost a decade later, Glanz (1994) reported little change in the role, outlining the chief duties of a vice principal as handling disruptive students, dealing with parental complaints, supervising lunch, scheduling coverage, completing survey forms,
completing book orders, and completing other administrative paperwork. Both studies gleaned responses from vice principals via informal interviews, observations, and survey questions. Vice principals indicated they had full responsibility for the development of the master schedule (Reed & Himmler, 1985) and devoted much of their time (at the high school level) to student supervision. In fact, during 7 days of shadowing vice principals, researchers determined that they spent most of their time “patrolling” the campus to “deal with problems before they got out of hand” (Reed & Himmler, 1985, p. 63). The primary function of a vice principal was to be visible and ready to take action if unanticipated events arose. Even though vice principals were expected to support the positive aspects of school, most of their days were spent on the negative aspects.

Glanz (1994) sent surveys to 164 vice principals, asking them to respond to questions about their roles such as: (a) What are your current responsibilities? (b) In your view, what duties should vice principals be performing? Respondents included 92 male and 72 female vice principals. Fifty-five percent had 5 or fewer years of experience as vice principals. Over 90% of the respondents indicated that their primary duties included handling disruptive students, dealing with parental complaints, supervising lunch duty, scheduling coverage, and completing surveys, book orders, and other administrative paperwork (Glanz, 1994). Very few of the vice principals reported any involvement in staff development, teacher training, or curriculum development; however, they preferred these duties. One vice principal stated, “I went to graduate school to complete certification by focusing on theories and research about instructional supervision, yet most, if not all, of my time is spent on mundane and mindless administrative routines, like lunch duty (Glanz, 1994, p. 285).
Although the role of vice principal held traditional status from the late 1980s through the early 1990s, scholars urged reconsideration of roles within the administrative team. For example, Spady (1985) maintained that vice principals should play a key role in the implementation of serious “improvement initiatives” (p. 109). According to Spady, vice principals could, “break-out of their custodial modality if schools were structured differently” (p. 112). He suggested a paradigm shift from a time-based model of instruction to an outcome-based model. The time-based model relied on master schedules, with the demands of the clock and the calendar driving instruction. Outcome-based instructional models required energy, talent, and commitment on the part of “many actors within each school building supported by central office policy and direction that places outcomes and learning results higher on the priority list than student custody and supervision” (Spady, 1985, p. 118). Spady further stated that moving to an outcome-based model would “represent a starting point for what could be a reconceptualization of the role of the vice principal in the areas of instructional improvement” (p. 110). He believed that vice principals possessed a “respectable degree of proficiency and knowledge” and were “adaptable survivors” who would “devote more time to things they believed will make a difference in their schools” (p. 120). Spady suggested that the outcome-based model afforded vice principals vital involvement in ensuring that the organizational and instructional systems of a school would run smoothly.

In her study of vice principals, Kwan (2009a) recommended seven dimensions of the vice principal role that were nearly opposite to those identified from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s (see Table 2). Educational reforms focused on improving
Table 2

_Vice Principal Roles in 1985 Versus 2009_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1985</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Supervision</td>
<td>1. External communication and connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Handling disruptive students</td>
<td>2. Quality assurance and accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dealing with parental complaints</td>
<td>3. Teaching, learning, and curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Scheduling</td>
<td>4. Staff management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Completing surveys</td>
<td>5. Resource management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Administrative paperwork</td>
<td>7. Strategic direction and policy environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

instruction; the changes shifted vice principal job responsibilities from operational to
instructional, as principals realized the immensity of the tasks at hand. In fact, the new
role descriptors more closely reflected job responsibilities associated with the
principalship, as shown in Table 2.

Even with these recommended shifts in duty, vice principals continue to observe a
misalignment between the roles and responsibilities they consider to be key to the success
of their schools and the tasks they actually undertake (Kwan & Walker, 2012). Vice
principals interviewed in Hong Kong reported that most of their time was spent on staff
management concerns, including supervising teachers and reviewing their performances,
handling grievances among teachers, and assigning work to staff (Kwan & Walker,
2012). Kwan and Walker (2012) labeled this misalignment in terms of “responsibility
gaps,” (p. 71) indicating that respondents had not spent sufficient time working in various
important dimensions of the job. The largest gap occurred in resource management,
which included preparing the school budget, making decisions about purchases, monitoring the condition of the school building, and preparing proposals for applications for government funds (Kwan, 2009a). Kwan and Walker indicated that principals may have been reluctant to share confidential financial information.

The second largest gap occurred in Leader and Teacher Growth Development, which included involving vice principals in planning training and development programs for teachers, mentoring beginning teachers, and advising teachers on professional development opportunities; this dimension also encompassed having vice principals attend conferences or workshops for their own professional development (Kwan, 2009a). The researchers suggested that this gap may have resulted from the current economic crisis. The only positive gap occurred in the dimension of Staff Management, which included orientating staff, assigning work to staff, supervising and reviewing performances of teachers and staff, recruiting teachers and support staff, and handling grievances of teachers and support staff. Vice principals surveyed indicated that this dimension accounted for how they spent most of their time and that the increase in workload “resulted from educational reforms” (Kwan & Walker, 2012, p. 72).

One must consider the cultural influences in Hong Kong with regard to professional roles in the educational setting as described by Kwan (2009a). According to Kwan and Walker (2012), “Human resource management responsibilities by vice principals poses significant challenges, given the high value attached to harmony in Hong Kong schools” (p. 75). Maintaining a harmonious school setting most likely would not be a consideration in the United States. In fact, a healthy level of constructive controversy might be considered advantageous as a means to advance innovation and
improvement (Uline, Tschannen-Moran, & Perez, 2003). However, it would be critical for a school leader in the United States to understand an existing school culture and to then determine how best to influence change for increased student achievement. In a recent investigation of vice principals in the United States, Sun (2012) surveyed 1,127 high school principals and 1,207 vice principals in New York State using the instrument designed by Glanz (1994). This survey included a ranking questionnaire devised to gather perceptions from vice principals with regard to their daily roles and responsibilities. Sun also conducted face-to-face interviews to determine what kinds of duties had changed since the survey was conducted in 1994. The experience of the 133 vice principal respondents ranged from 2 months to 23 years. Thirty-nine percent had been vice principals for less than 3 years; 17.3% were categorized as veterans, having served 10 years or more; and 46.3% had been in the position 4 to 9 years. The survey included two identical lists of 25 vice principal duties to be ranked according to (a) what vice principals actually do on a daily basis, and (b) what vice principals think they should do daily (Glanz, 1994, p. 160). Based on the responses, Table 3 details the top five duties vice principals actually do and what they think they should do.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duties of Vice Principals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What Vice Principals Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative duties—paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental conferences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To test whether the duties vice principals actually performed in 2010 were different from the duties they thought they should perform, Sun (2012) employed a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient for the 25 duties. According to the data, duties performed by vice principals in 2010 did not differ much from those performed by vice principals in 1994. However, the 10 face-to-face interviews provided Sun with more detailed and precise information from the participants. During the interviews, vice principals agreed that their duties “were still the same as the top five duties ranked in 1994” (Sun, 2012, p. 167). Vice principals did state that they actually attended to “more” than those duties listed (p. 167). For example, one vice principal with 12 years of experience shared the following:

Years ago there was an assumption that the main role of the vice principal was primarily disciplinary. But, I don’t think that’s true anymore, and I don’t believe it’s our sole role anyway. I think the VPs today are more active in instructional leadership, such as more evaluation of teachers, more becoming active in looking at curriculum and spending more time on the data. This allows us to help teachers with data and give them the backup support they need. (Sun, 2012, p. 167)

Vice principals interviewed reported they were more involved in teacher evaluations, classroom observations, attending grad-level meetings, administering tests, collecting data, and analyzing results. One vice principal stated that he was going to be a principal the following semester, and he shared that his work as a vice principal “strengthened his qualifications and abilities for the principal position while he was an assistant principal” (Sun, 2012, p. 168).
While Sun’s (2012) recent administering of the Glanz (1994) survey confirmed that the traditional professional identity of the vice principal has not changed much since 1994, it did provide quantitative and qualitative data indicating that vice principal involvement in instruction-related tasks has increased. Additionally, 4 out of the 10 vice principals interviewed shared that they “welcomed their new role” (Sun, 2012, p. 171).

Although it is important to identify the roles and responsibilities of the vice principal from his or her own perspective, it is also imperative to understand how those duties and responsibilities transcend to the role of principal. Marshall et al. (1992) found “the assistant principalship is a major recruitment position for the principalship and other administrative positions” (p. 80). If the vice principal position is the stepping-stone to the principalship, it benefits researchers to gather qualitative data that describes how the role of the vice principal supports the principalship.

**Leadership Succession**

Given the current national pursuit for academic excellence, best practices for school leadership succession have become increasingly important. Hargreaves (2005) stated, “One of the most significant events in the life of a school is a change in its leadership” (p. 163). According to Myung et al. (2011), succession management systems are developed so that organizations can effectively identify and promote individuals who demonstrate the competencies to be successful leaders. Fink and Brayman (2006) found that thoughtfully planned succession supports sustained school improvement by elevating staff commitment and communication. “Sustainable improvement demands committed relationships that contribute to the growth and the good of everyone” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, p. 694). Further, Peters (2011) found succession planning “involves envisioning
where the organization should be and what steps are necessary to get there” (p. 81). She recommended that districts should “require schools to develop a plan for leadership succession” to minimize instability (p. 80). Peters also suggested that districts should “develop career plans for vice principals who are potential principals in the pipeline” (p. 81) so as to deliberately plan for principal succession.

Illustrating the need for thoughtful succession plans, Hargreaves (2005) and Fink and Brayman (2006) referred to Wenger’s (1998) view of successful succession planning as dependent on employing outbound and inbound leadership knowledge. According to Wenger, inbound leadership knowledge resides with principals who become “full participants in its practice” (p. 154). In the beginning of their tenure, those leaders may remain on the periphery of the learning community, but in time, they become insiders who establish themselves as full and active members of the community. Conversely, those who plan or expect to move out of a community have outbound leadership knowledge (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Their outbound knowledge is employed to preserve the past success, sustain improvement, and to leave a legacy (Hargreaves, 2005). Hargreaves (2005) suggested that inbound leadership knowledge improved a school, especially when a carefully chosen leader applied this knowledge to become a full participant, thereby earning the trust of the staff and community. This sense of “continuity occurs when the assignment of a new principal reflects a well-thought-out succession plan meant to sustain and build on the goals of a predecessor” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 164). In contrast, “preoccupation” with outbound transitions often accompanies a charismatic principal who “convinces the staff members to believe in his/her mystical qualities rather than in themselves” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 169). This dysfunctional
dynamic may cause an atmosphere of adoration, creating an environment where successors can never live up to the former leader’s legend. Throughout discussions of leadership succession, growing consensus suggests that effective principals should be retained for more than 5 years to realize substantive improvements in their schools (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005). Furthermore, “sustainable improvement and the contributions principals make must be measured over many years and several principals, not just one or two” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 164). In contrast, repeated transitions negatively influence school culture and staff commitment (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Multiple successions within a short time period amount to a “revolving door which breeds cynicism [and] subverts long-term sustainable improvement” (Fink & Brayman, 2006, p. 84).

Fink and Brayman (2006) interviewed teachers and principals to examine school change in relationship to leadership succession; they were also intent on discovering the intentions of new principals as they entered and exited sites. Interview data revealed four factors that led to problematic principal succession. First, the principal turnover rate had accelerated rapidly. They noted, “Rapid leadership transitions limited leaders’ abilities to create and leave a lasting legacy” (Fink & Brayman, 2006, p. 84). Second, principals who made strides were “able to access or develop the inbound knowledge that prepared them for their jobs”; however, “they moved-up leaving new leaders behind to manage” (p. 84) unfinished reform demands. Third, stakeholders required “considerable lead time” to develop a shared understanding and commitment so as to “harmonize the new principal’s inbound knowledge with the outbound knowledge of the departing principal” (p. 85). Fink and Brayman found that teachers reported great changes in leaders and leadership
styles over the decades. From the larger-than-life characters of the 1960s and 1970s to
the systems managers of the 1980s, and finally to the principals who were “more of a
passing presence in the school than a lasting influence on its development” in the 1990s
(p. 86). Because of this changing nature of leadership and the rapid turnover of school
leaders, stakeholders may view principals as ‘interchangeable messengers” rather than
leaders who are committed to lasting school success (p. 86).

**Tapping—An Informal Succession Plan**

In an effort to find qualified candidates to fill vacant leadership positions, some
school districts rely on principals to identify and motivate teachers to become school
leaders. This “tapping” approach is used in some school districts in lieu of formal
leadership recruitment processes (Myung et al., 2011). According to Myung et al. (2011),
promoting individuals into leadership positions can be classified into three general
categories: self-selection, selection based on leadership competencies, and selection based
on characteristics not necessarily related to leadership effectiveness. Myung et al.
elaborated on occupational mobility, making the distinction between contest and
sponsored mobility. Under contest mobility, every candidate has an equal chance to
attain a position “through fair and open procedures” (Myung, 2011, p. 698). A candidate
advances according to his or her merits. Sponsored mobility refers to teachers who are
recruited for leadership because they have demonstrated administrative ability. Those
candidates have been identified by a current leader and have been encouraged to pursue a
role in school administration. Some school districts have purposefully used sponsored
mobility as a succession management system to “grow their own leaders” and create a
“talent pool” within their organization (p. 699).
Myung et al. (2011) examined the “identification of potential teachers for school leadership in the absence of a formal succession management system” (p. 700). The researchers distributed surveys to every principal and vice principal in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. From the 16,735 responses, the researchers determined which teachers had been encouraged to pursue administrative positions via tapping. The study revealed that 72% of the current principals had been tapped by former principals. Also, 52% of the current vice principals had been tapped by principals, while 38% had been tapped by someone representing the district’s central office. Eleven percent of the teachers surveyed expressed interest in becoming leaders at some point in their careers, and 22% had been tapped by their peers. Myung et al. found that a “teacher who is tapped is five times as likely to be interested in becoming a principal as a teacher who is not tapped” (p. 717). In contrast, only 7% of principals surveyed reported not being tapped by someone in leadership. The study revealed that principals do not tap teachers at random. Rather, they tap teachers who have taken on school leadership responsibilities and who have expressed an interest in becoming administrators. These findings appear to suggest that as “principals recognize the efficacy of their encouragement to motivate teachers to become principals in the future they may become more motivated to tap” (Myung et al., 2011, p. 723).

Myung et al. (2011) found that tapping builds leadership capacity from within a school district. Still, the informal nature of tapping can lead to exclusion. For example, the study determined that principals were more likely to tap teachers of their same race. “Hispanic principals are significantly more likely to tap Hispanic teachers and significantly less likely to tap African American teachers” (Myung et al., 2011, p. 714).
Therefore, it benefits a school district not to rely solely on tapping as a succession management system.

According to Hargreaves and Fink (2004), “leadership succession is the last challenge of leadership” (p. 4). The authors insist, “It is the challenge of letting go, moving on, and planning for one’s own obsolescence” (p. 4). They indicate that educational leaders want to “accomplish goals that matter, inspire others to join them in working toward those goals, and leave lasting legacy” (p. 1). In terms of creating sustainable leadership, Hargreaves and Fink elaborated on the following principles that will ultimately lead to successful leadership succession:

1. Sustainable Leadership Matters.
2. Sustainable Leadership Lasts.
4. Sustainable Leadership Is Socially Just.
5. Sustainable Leadership Is Resourceful.
7. Sustainable Leadership Is Active.

Hargreaves and Fink underscored these principles, noting that sustainable leadership “demands serious attention to be paid to leadership succession” (p. 5).

Although research demonstrates the need for succession plans, districts must work to cultivate new leaders from vice principal pools. According to Marshall et al. (1992), 80% of vice principals aspire to become principals or hold higher-level administrative positions. The researchers generated six “categories of orientation” to the vice principal position, as shown in Table 4.
Table 4

*Categories of Orientation for Vice Principals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified categories in VP career process</th>
<th>Example of categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Upwardly-Mobile Assistant</td>
<td>Has an active network of colleagues in professional organization, has the influence of a sponsor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Career Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Does not wish to be a principal, and has a good relationship with higher administrators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The “Plateaued” Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Would like to be a principal; has applied, but has been rebuffed; does not have mentor assistance; may have made a mistake in his/her career; frustrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The “Shafted” Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Has fulfilled criteria for the upwardly mobile, but has been denied promotion; has lost a sponsor’s help; lack of mobility may be due to district changes; highly frustrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Assistant Principal Who Considers Leaving</td>
<td>The vice principal may be young enough to develop another career and has other skills outside of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The Downwardly-Mobile Administrator</td>
<td>A reverse career trend from principal to assistant principal or assistant principal to teacher; these reversals are involuntary. Some assistant principals request voluntary reversal due to health issues or a wish to return to the preferred job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After interviewing 20 vice principals, Marshall et al. (1992) found that opportunity for advancement exists when a vice principal has shown an ability to handle tasks and remain calm in a crisis, has respected sponsorship, and has a desire for leadership.
Desire for Leadership

The role of principal is complex (Crow, 2006). Around the world, new principals are encountering the complexity of educational leadership in the 21st century (Cheung & Walker, 2006; Crow, 2006; Quong, 2006). According to Crow (2006):

Principals in most schools in the United States now encounter a vastly different and more challenging organizational setting, which demands community support in social, mental, and health services; professional development for principals and teachers in cultural sensitivity and learning styles; instructional monitoring and support for new kinds of educational services, and a commitment to ensuring that all students learn. (p. 315)

Likewise, Cheung and Walker (2006) found that new school leaders in Hong Kong face similar situations characterized by “constant reforms, inconsistent political agendas and unprecedented socio-cultural shifts that assail established beliefs and ways of working” (p. 389). New principals in Australia have experienced professional isolation and loneliness, and experienced difficulties “implementing new government initiatives” (Quong, 2006, p. 377). According to Crow (2006), “increased accountability and public scrutiny has added to the complexity of the principal’s job, requiring principals to be entrepreneurial, to be more focused on student outcomes and instructional processes, and to be more connected with their communities” (p. 316).

After interviewing over 60 new principals with less than 3 years of principal experience, Shoho and Barnett (2010) concluded that new principals, who had previously served as vice principals, felt “most prepared for issues pertaining to building school culture, communicating across various constituencies, personnel issues including
curriculum supervision and professional development and understanding the daily operations of the school” (p. 576). However, the new principals also admitted feeling “less prepared for budgetary issues and the enormity of the job” (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 577), specifically in the areas of special education and curriculum.

Cheung and Walker (2006) revealed similar findings in Hong Kong. In their qualitative study, the researchers interviewed 10 beginning principals at 3-month intervals in a variety of settings, observed participants at work, obtained personal records, and conducted focus groups. They conducted the interviews over a 12-month period, attempting to capture the complexities of the role of principal. Of the 10 principals interviewed, more than half had served as vice principals for at least 8 years. The study identified the following five major categories that described the life of beginning principals: preferred leadership orientations, strength of heart, managing people, approach to curriculum reform, and contextual influences.

Preferred leadership orientations involved perceptions of “what the principals believed they needed to do to fulfill the requirements of the job” (Chueng & Walker, 2006, p. 396). “Strength of heart” referred to the “interaction between a principal’s self-perception and sense of efficacy” (Chueng & Walker, 2006, p. 396). Predictably, principals who perceived themselves as having a strong character were more likely to have a stronger sense of efficacy than those who demonstrated high levels of self-doubt. Managing people referred to the ways the principals interacted with others to resolve management issues. The category of curriculum reform identified the beginning principal’s attitude toward the implementation of reform. In terms of contextual influences, Cheung and Walker (2006) identified the changing expectations of the
beginning principals within two categories: *inner worlds* and *outer limits* (p. 390). Inner worlds referenced a new principal’s own expectations, emotions, psychological state, ideological inclinations, and value system as he or she related to first experiences as a principal. Outer limits linked to the organizational and broader systems environment, respectively, managing people, and curricular reform. Both of those terms became identifiable contextual features that influenced the work of beginning principals in Hong Kong. Findings indicated “personal leadership role preferences and strength of heart lead to the fluidity of the beginning principals’ leadership orientation and behavior” (Cheung & Walker, 2006, p. 404). According to Cheung and Walker, new principals move within the categories during their first year of leadership as they attempt to cope with tensions of their inner worlds and the outer constraints of policies and reform.

On the other hand, Retelle (2010) interviewed 10 vice principals to determine positive facilitators, as well as barriers, to the principalship. The vice principals candidly discussed both during the interview as recorded in Table 5. Of the 10 vice principal participants, 4 were promoted to principalships. Retelle concluded that vice principals are “political actors to their own careers” (p. 12) and that the key factors for promotion involve self-advocacy and highlighting leadership work. Additionally, data revealed that if a member of the interview committee was an advocate for the interviewee, the vice principal had an advantage.

Data revealed that the vice principals “gained knowledge and leadership via daily work, principals, colleagues, and district workshops” (Retelle, 2010, p. 5). By year’s end, 4 of the 10 vice principals were promoted to principalships. Those vice principals
Table 5

Facilitators and Barriers to the Principalship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators to the principalship</th>
<th>Barriers hindering promotion to the principalship</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Obtained mentoring and training support from principal</td>
<td>• Principal conducted little mentoring and provided limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Worked with “principal makers”—principals who were well-connected within the district</td>
<td>• Principal did not have the respect of the district—no political capital in the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attended district professional development opportunities</td>
<td>• Stated they were “not allowed” to attend professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Secured endorsement of area/associate superintendent</td>
<td>• Did not maintain sponsorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintained visibility in the district—vice principals are well-known</td>
<td>• Lacked visibility in the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practiced self-advocacy—promoted and highlighted leadership skills to district leaders</td>
<td>• Did not advocate for self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Networked—attended leadership meetings, workshops for district leadership administrators</td>
<td>• Did not participate in leadership organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

reported that positive relationships with principals, district leaders, and the teachers’ union “were critical to their promotion to the principalship” (p. 5).

The participants in both the Cheung and Walker (2006) and Shoho and Barnett (2010) studies were seasoned vice principals who elected to serve their communities, teachers, students, and families. According to Shoho and Barnett, beginning principals, even those who had served considerable tenure as vice principals, were “surprised by the gravity of the principalship . . . astonished at the volume of tasks and the gravity of the notion that the ‘buck stops here’ . . . and felt less prepared for issues and the enormity of
the job” (p. 577). Quong (2006) recommended that new principals be “prepared to make and live with hard decisions which may not be popular” (p. 382). Given these sobering circumstances, one might ask: Why would a vice principal aspire to become a principal? According to Crow (2006):

> Beginning principals’ socialization begins with the teaching career and provides the opportunity to understand how these beginning principals develop their instructional orientation, their understanding of the nature of knowledge, their cultural sensitivity to students, and their conceptions of instructional leadership. (p. 317)

Likewise, Shoho and Barnett (2010), stated:

> Principal development accounted for significant learning experiences that occur before entry to the profession. These conceptualizations acknowledge that novices are influenced by earlier personal, social, and professional experiences which affect their job expectations and their perceived capabilities to succeed as principals. (p. 565)

Therefore, the desire for leadership is not actualized when one acquires the title of principal. Rather, it begins early in life when one may have been assigned important tasks or charged with organizing an activity or an event. It is the title of principal that drives one to seek change for the better and equity for all. The brotherhood/sisterhood of principals comprises a select group of individuals who “acknowledge how the complexities of societal changes impact the socialization of this important group of leaders” (Crow, 2006, p. 322). Vice principals, likely former teacher leaders, continue
their career paths by following the leaders who came before them. These leaders have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of students.

**District Support for Leadership Capacity**

Gorton (1987) wrote, “The job of leading a school is too demanding for one person, and the one-person concept of leadership fails to recognize the significant contributions that an assistant principal can make” (p. 1). He believed it was imperative to increase the leadership capacity for vice principals and stated, “If the assistant principalship position is to improve, it will require enlightened and dedicated leadership by principals” (p. 1). As school districts play a central role in providing sustained professional development for principals, they must also consider the professional development of vice principals. Traditionally, professional development with the goal of increasing student achievement has focused on principals and teachers. However, because of the “rising tide” (Kwan, 2009b, p. 203) of educational reforms and school-based initiatives, the responsibility of school accountability falls upon all, including vice principals. In that the role of the vice principal is the “most common career path followed to acquire the position of principal” (Busch et al., 2012, p. 36), it is imperative that principals include vice principals in all facets of professional development. Because of a dearth of research with regard to professional development for vice principals, this literature review relies on current trends in professional development for principals. According to Honig (2012), Instructional Leadership Directors (ILDs) build “supportive partnerships between central office staff and principals” (p. 735). She notes:
A handful of urban school districts have launched ambitious reforms of their central offices to help improve teaching and learning in schools . . . moving away from occasional professional development for principals to prioritizing ongoing, intensive, job-embedded support to school principals to help them improve classroom instruction. (p. 734)

Similarly, Mangin (2007) found that the school district provides important social context influencing “what principals know and how they use their knowledge” (p. 333). More specifically, Mangin’s research focused on how “communication from district-level supervisors influenced the principals’ knowledge of teacher leadership” (p. 350). She found that supervisors used a variety of approaches when working with principals. In her study, Honig (2012) found that deputy or area superintendents, or ILDs, provided “job-embedded support to school principals to help them improve classroom instruction” (p. 734). The ILDs’ “main charge was to help an assigned group of principals strengthen their “instructional leadership” (Honig, 2012, p. 744). Data from interviews with principals and ILDs revealed a district-wide organizational structure within which small groups of principals worked individually or in networks with their area ILD. Both ILDs and principals perceived that these ongoing relationships and interactions improved instructional leadership capacity (Honig, 2012). Data collected from interviews, observations, and document reviews during one school year were triangulated. Honig developed a theoretical framework to identify which ILD practices or approaches strengthened or weakened support for principals’ instructional leadership. For example, one ILD stated:
It may be about sitting with their professional development team, listening to what they’re trying to put together, and then asking questions to help them through that. It could be in terms of an initiative that the school may have and they want to see how the instruction is going, or it could be because they want a different lens on a teacher that they feel is not performing up to par and they just want my input on that. It could be a parent meeting where they’re having to explain the data and how to look up the data. It could be around having conversations with some principals that may be stressed and overwhelmed and talking crazy, like “I’m quitting.” (p. 749)

Another ILD shared she once “stayed physically close to the principal . . . walked the principal point-by-point” [through a rubric] and “challenged the principal to link evidence from the observation to the rubric” (p. 749). The ILD concluded this joint-work session by “suggesting how the principal could practice such observations on his or her own before the ILD’s next visit” (p. 750). Honig found some ILDs “explicitly modeled or demonstrated how to act like an instructional leader” (p. 751).

In contrast to ongoing joint work and explicit modeling, other ILDs reported they were unable to allocate individually focused time because of the many principals they supervised. Instructional Leadership Directors who described inconsistent or negligible examples of modeling were apt to give directions for rather than demonstrations of the work. According to Honig (2012), ILD practices “seem to provide stronger or weaker supports for principals’ instructional leadership” (p. 745). Those who provided strong support, described this support as ‘teaching’” (p. 760). Instructional Leadership Directors who offered “inconsistent or negligible” examples of their support “visibly struggled with
the inconsistency between their expectations of the position . . . and the intended focus of
the ILD position—to strengthen principal instructional leadership” (Honig, 2012, p. 760).

In another study, Mangin (2007) examined “communication from district-level
supervisors as one possible means of influencing principals’ knowledge and their support
for teacher leaders” (p. 326). Mangin likened the relationship between principals and
district supervisors to that between principals and teachers. She found that if district
supervisors supported principal leadership, principals supported teacher leadership. She
stated “principals appear to mimic the supervisor’s approach in their own efforts to
communicate expectations to teachers” (p. 350). She also stated:

Principals with high levels of knowledge and interaction actively supported
teacher leaders by communicating with teachers about teacher leadership. These
principals identified teacher leaders as a resource for improvement, communicated
expectations for teachers’ instructional improvement, and expected teachers to
interact with the teacher leaders. (p. 348)

Just as educational reform initiatives make a difference for all students, district
and school leadership provide a “critical bridge” between the two (Leithwood et al., 2004,
p. 14). Additionally, as principal vacancies increase, it will become imperative that
“district leaders identify and promote vice principals who will facilitate student academic
success within a caring school climate” (Retelle, 2010, p. 2). According to the Southern
Regional Education Board (SREB) report developed by Schmidt-Davis (2011), the
problem of filling principal vacancies has to do with ensuring quality. The report stated,
“School districts need to identify, develop, and successfully place leaders of learning” in
schools rather than finding “warm bodies” to fill school leadership vacancies (p. 8). The
report recommended promoting from within school districts to fill open principal positions. It stated, “Highly effective districts grow their own leaders” because “insiders outperform outsiders” (p. 9). The report concluded that the vice principaship is a primary stepping-stone to the principalship, and that successful principals are the best mentors for aspiring principals. Therefore, it benefits school districts to include vice principals in professional development alongside their principal mentors.
CHAPTER 3—METHODOLOGY

The literature review in Chapter 2 acknowledges the significant role vice principals play as they develop the skills needed to transition successfully into leadership positions as principals. The current demand for strong instructional leadership is apparent, but vice principals are often too bogged down in student discipline and operational matters to contribute significantly as leaders. An in-depth investigation of highly effective principals could highlight how they leveraged their experiences as vice principals when transitioning into leadership roles as principals. Any such investigation would involve asking the skilled principals to reflect on their responsibilities and encounters as vice principals and to share their perspectives on how those experiences helped shape them as instructional leaders.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to determine how the duties assumed by vice principals serve as “stepping-stones” to the principalship (Marshall et al., 1992, p. 80). Shoho and Barnett (2010) stated, “[Novice] principals are influenced by earlier personal, social, and professional experiences, which affect their job expectations and their perceived capabilities to succeed as principals” (p. 565). Therefore, the methodology was qualitative in nature and includes in-depth interviews of principals who formerly served as vice principals. Participants included early-career principals and more seasoned principals serving at high performing schools. The researcher adhered to the characteristics of qualitative research as detailed by Plano Clark and Creswell (2009), through which the researcher
[studies] a problem that calls for exploration; relies on the views of participants; asks broad general questions; collects data consisting largely of words from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective and reflexive manner. (p. 66)

To “describe the essential aspects of the experiences” of principals when they served as vice principals, a phenomenological research design was utilized (Plano & Creswell, 2010, p. 238). According to Plano Clark and Creswell (2010), phenomenological research design is useful when researchers need to “understand the essence of a phenomenon as it is experienced by individuals” (p. 239). More, Creswell (2007) explained the goal of phenomenology is to:

Reduce the textural (what) and structural (how) meanings of experiences to a brief description that typifies the experiences of all the participants in the study. All individuals experience it; hence, it is invariant, and it is a reduction to the “essentials of the experiences.” (p. 235)

Researchers who choose phenomenology as a research design wish to capture the essence of the lived experiences of those participating in the study. For example, Creswell (2007) provided an exemplar phenomenological study in which researchers Anderson and Spencer interviewed AIDS patients. Via interviews, the researchers were able to identify emerging themes that helped describe cognitive representations of the participants’ illnesses.

This researcher desired to understand the essence of the principals’ lived experiences while they served as vice principals. In this case, the phenomenon of interest is the work life of vice principals, especially as it provides learning opportunities for
leaders. Additionally, the researcher “bracketed” her own experiences that pertain to the phenomenon. Creswell (2009) defines bracketing as:

The process by which the researcher reflects on his or her own views and experiences related to the study’s central phenomenon, describes these perspectives in writing, and then works to set them aside (or bracket them) during the analysis process. (p. 287)

The phenomenological approach sought to advance an understanding of how the roles and responsibilities of vice principals prepare those individuals for the duties of the principalship.

**Data-Collection Methods**

In terms of the qualitative domain, face-to-face interviews were utilized (see Appendix A). Purposefully selected principals, either early-career or more seasoned principals serving at high performing schools, were contacted via email or phone call by the researcher (see Appendices B and C) and asked to participate in semi-structured interviews. Responding to interview questions afforded participants opportunities to compare and contrast their work experiences as vice principals and principals. The interviews served as attempts to “understand the world from the subjects [principals’] points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the interviews sought “to obtain descriptions of the subjects [principals’] own lived work with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 27). In addition, the researcher sought to “nuance accounts of different aspects of the interviewee’s [principals’] life world, it works with words and not
with numbers” (p. 30). Principals were asked to describe job-related duties they fulfilled as vice principals. In addition, they were asked to indicate which experiences transferred most directly in terms of their responsibilities as principals and to describe how those duties inform their current work.

**Interview Participants and Process**

Participants were selected using the following criteria:

- Participant served as a vice principal prior to becoming a principal.
- He/she served as a principal for no more than 5 years.
- He/she works within one district in a large urban county in Southern California.
- His/her school has maintained an API of over 800 for at least 2 years.
- His/her school is closing the achievement gap for all subgroups.

The final interviewees were determined based on accessibility. Each principal was interviewed individually using a semi-structured protocol (Appendix A). For each participant, a series of interviews were conducted for a total of 45 to 55 minutes; the interview sessions were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews occurred during and after school hours, depending on each principal’s availability. One-on-one interviews provided each participant an opportunity to share his or her ideas (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Principals were selected from the same large, urban southern California school district.

The open-ended questions (Appendix A) provided opportunities for principals to describe the job-related duties they experienced as vice principals that have been most directly transferable to their principalships. The use of the open-ended questions afforded
each interviewee a chance to “create his/her own options for responding” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 257). Digitally recording the interviews and focus groups provided the researcher with specific details that could be listened to repeatedly to ensure accuracy (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Potential open-ended questions and talking points included:

- When did you decide that you wanted to become an administrator?
- How long were you a vice principal?
- Describe specific vice principal responsibilities that contributed to your understanding of the responsibilities and duties as a principal.
- Describe vice principal responsibilities that did not contribute to your understanding of the responsibilities and duties as a principal.
- Are there experiences you now wish you’d had as a vice principal? If so, detail them and describe how those experiences might have better prepared you for your current role as principal.
- Describe how your former principal facilitated your development as a leader.
- Describe three specific problems of practice you successfully addressed as a vice principal. How does the knowledge gained through those experiences inform your current work as a principal?
- How long have you been a principal at this site?
- Describe your “typical” day as a principal. How does it differ from your “typical” day as a vice principal?
- Describe a major difference between being a vice principal and being a principal.
**Data Analysis**

Using Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as a guide, the process of “meaning condensation” was utilized to analyze the data. This process compresses long statements into briefer statements to rephrase what has been said in a few words. Meaning condensation of the interviews involved the following five steps:

1. The researcher thoroughly read the transcription of each interview to “get a sense of the whole” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 205).
2. The researcher determined central themes.
3. The researcher identified domain themes.
4. The researcher analyzed the underlying meaning.
5. The researcher “tied together” the “essential, non-redundant themes of the entire interview into a descriptive statement” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 207).

The meaning condensation served to “analyze extensive and often complex interview texts by looking for natural meaning units and explicating their main themes” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 207). Categories were added later in the analysis to ensure that new categories were not missing from data. Meanings were formulated from the categories based on significant statements and phrases of the participants. As part of the analysis, those meanings were clustered into themes. The researcher highlighted quotes and examples that supported each major theme identified. The results were then integrated into an inclusive description of the phenomenon under study. The final analysis included an explanation of the essence of the phenomenon that described the
principals’ experiences as vice principals; this overview highlighted which skills transferred most directly to their current work as principals.

**Ethical Issues**

During all phases of the research process, the researcher was sensitive to any ethical concerns that arose (Creswell, 2007). Throughout the research process, every effort was made to protect the confidentiality of all participants. With this in mind, the interviewed principals were provided an explanation of the intent of the study, and participants were informed of their right to “voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time” (Creswell, 2007, p. 123). In addition, a confidentiality agreement and voluntary consent form (Appendix D) was signed by participants and returned to the researcher; the form documented any possible risks of participating in the study per the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were also informed that pseudonyms would be used in an effort to protect their identity. Because the researcher served as a vice principal and subsequently became a principal during the study, she “bracketed” her knowledge as it pertained to the subject so that any personal bias did not influence her findings (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). In that the interviews may have “treated sensitive topics” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 186), the recordings will be erased at the study’s end.

The researcher employed rigorous data-collection procedures (Creswell, 2007). In addition, she ensured the confidentiality of data collected via interviews. Had any unforeseen ethical issue arisen, the researcher would have sought counsel from the university advisor (Appendix E). All data gathered were used solely for the analytical purposes of the researcher. Ultimately, participants may benefit from this opportunity
that could facilitate district change regarding how aspiring leaders are provided professional development and afforded leadership opportunities that expand their knowledge base that ultimately leads to increased student achievement.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how the leadership practices of early-career and more seasoned principals serving at high performing schools are informed and influenced by their past experiences as vice principals. The qualitative data gleaned from the study will serve as a starting point to gain a deeper understanding of how the role of vice principal serves as a stepping-stone to the principalship. The body of research presented in the literature review provides evidence that the vice principal plays a significant role in the school setting and that principals make a substantial difference in how a school operates. Although the participants in this study represent a single school district within a single county, utilizing interviewing techniques for data collection to answer the overarching research question will serve to highlight the essence of the participants’ own lived experiences while serving as principals.
CHAPTER 4—FINDINGS FROM DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This phenomenological study presents the lived experiences of principals as they described how their previous duties as vice principals informed their present practices. Phenomenology provides an opportunity for individuals to share their life experiences in order to “understand the essence of a phenomenon as it is experienced by individuals” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 239). Descriptions of various experiences are provided to help the reader gain insight, and verbatim quotations afford him or her opportunities to hear participants speak for themselves.

This chapter reports data obtained from extended one-to-one interviews with 12 highly effective principals. Data from the interviews describe how previous vice principal duties informed and influenced the current leadership practices of principals. The goal of the research was to increase understanding of how vice principal work experiences can be better leveraged as apprentice opportunities for future principals. All participants were employed by the San Juanita School District (SJSD), which serves more than 130,000 students across 226 school campuses, including 117 traditional elementary schools, 9 K-8 schools, 25 traditional middle schools, 24 high schools, 49 charter schools, and 14 atypical or alternative schools. The student population within the SJSD is extremely diverse, representing more than 15 ethnic groups and more than 60 languages and dialects. The SJSD is one of the 10 largest urban school districts in the United States. To participate in this study, each highly effective principal must have:

- Served as a vice principal prior to becoming a principal.
- He/she served as a principal for no more than 5 years.
• He/she works within one district in a large urban county in Southern California.

• His/her school has maintained an API of more than 800 for at least 2 years.

• His/her school is closing the achievement gap for subgroups.

To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were employed for both the school district and the principal participants.

Each principal participated in a 1-hour digitally recorded interview. The principals were asked open-ended questions that provided them opportunities to describe job-related vice principal duties they found most transferable to the role of principal. Of the 12 participants, 9 were elementary principals, 3 male and 6 female, and 3 were middle school principals, all male. Eight of the principals had served as vice principals at middle schools prior to becoming principals. Of those eight, two became principals at middle schools, and six became principals at elementary schools. One current middle school principal had served as a high school vice principal. The following is a brief description of each participant. Seven of the 12 principals were deemed highly effective, as they had served in their current roles for at least 2 years and maintained an API score of 800 or higher. The other five also served as principals of schools that earned an API of 800 or higher but had served in that position for less than 1 year. As early-career principals, those leaders had fresh recall of their experiences as vice principals. The varied sample of participants afforded the researcher a significant opportunity to learn about the phenomenon under study.
**Participant Profiles**

Steve has been the principal at a high-performing elementary school for 3 years. His school serves 750 students in grades K-5 and had an API of 920 in 2013. Steve began his teaching career as a middle school science teacher. Although Steve was asked by both of his previous administrators to consider an administrative path, he enjoyed teaching and learning. Eventually, Steve left the classroom and the SJSD to work with a team of science leaders. They provided professional development in science to schools throughout the United States, an experience that piqued Steve’s interest in leadership. He returned to the SJSD and earned an administrative credential. Steve served as a vice principal for 6 years at three different middle schools before becoming a principal at his current school.

The year of this study was MaryAnn’s first year as a principal at an elementary school serving 475 students and with an API of 986 in 2013. MaryAnn began her career in special education, providing support to principals throughout the district. Her mentor encouraged her to become an administrator, and she was motivated to do so. MaryAnn began working as a vice principal at an elementary school under the leadership of a principal who would soon become the superintendent of the SJSD. MaryAnn served as vice principal for 4 months prior to becoming the principal at her current school.

For the past 4 years, Trina has been the principal of a 60-year-old elementary school that serves 550 students. The school achieved an API of 963 in 2013. After Trina left the classroom, she became a peer coach and staff developer for the SJSD for 4 years. In that capacity, she provided professional development support to several elementary sites throughout the SJSD. After working closely with teachers and principals, Trina
decided to obtain an administrative credential and was assigned the vice principalship at a middle school. She worked there for 2 years before becoming the principal at her current site.

Lori is the new principal of her elementary school, which serves 275 students. Her school earned an API of 876 in 2013. After working as a classroom teacher for 11 years, Lori was asked by her staff and administrator to serve as the peer coach and staff developer for her site. She held that position for 6 years before earning an administrative credential. Lori served as vice principal for a total of 7 years at one middle school and one elementary school before she signed on as the principal at her current school.

For the past 3 years, Sam has been the principal at his middle school, which serves 1,000 students. In 2013, his school scored an API of 906. Sam began his career as a teacher and then served as a counselor at a high school for 6 years before he became the principal at his middle school.

Early in his teaching career, Dave took on a leadership role at his school. He was encouraged by his principal, vice principals, and university professors to move into administration. Dave became a peer coach and staff developer for his site. After earning an administrative credential, he became a vice principal at a middle school where he worked closely with the principal and another vice principal. After 2 years, he transferred to another middle school, where he served as vice principal for 2 years. When his former principal retired, Dave applied for the principalship of that school, which has 591 students. He has served as the principal for 3 years, leading the small middle school to an API of 821 in 2013.
Tom was a teacher before he began working at the district level, training and supporting principals on master scheduling. He met his future principal at principal training sessions. Tom admired her leadership, obtained an administrative credential, and asked her for a job. He served as the vice principal at her middle school for the next 6 years. When the principal moved on to another middle school, Tom applied for her former job. He has been the principal at that middle school of 785 students for 6 months. In 2013, his school had an API standing of 862.

Susan taught at an elementary school for 4 years before becoming a middle school teacher. After 8 years, she obtained an administrative credential. At that time, a vice principalship opened up, and Susan got the job. She was the vice principal at that middle school for 12 years before becoming the principal at an elementary school. Susan has served as the principal for 6 months. Her school of 452 students scored an API of 949 in 2013.

Mary Kay enjoyed being a teacher at the elementary level until she became a peer coach and staff developer for the SJSD. Actively encouraged by her administrator, Mary Kay applied for an administrative intern program through which she earned an administrative credential. She then became a vice principal. Mary Kay worked at two different middle schools for a total of 5 years before becoming the principal at her elementary school of 320 students. For 3 years, she has served as principal at that school, which in 2013 earned an API of 931.

Mike was an elementary teacher and a teacher leader until he stepped out of the teacher role to become the parent academic liaison for his school. Heeding the advice of his principal, Mike earned an administrative credential. He became the vice principal at a
middle school, where he served for 5 years. He has been the principal at his elementary school for 6 months. His school of 250 students earned an API of 916 in 2013.

Dennis distinguished himself as a teacher leader from the beginning of his career. He quickly began providing science professional development for the SJSD, and his vice principal and principal encouraged him to pursue an administrative credential. He served as an elementary vice principal for 2 years before becoming the principal at an elementary school. He has been the principal of his school for 3 years, leading it to earn an API of 863 in 2013.

After teaching for 3 years, Gloria knew she wanted to move into a leadership role. She earned an administrative credential and worked for the SJSD in the Program Improvement and Planning Department before becoming a vice principal at a middle school. She served as a vice principal for nearly 3 years before becoming a principal of a high-performing elementary school and scored an API 912 in 2013. Gloria has been the principal at that elementary school for 3 years.

Table 6 details each principal participant’s preadministrative leadership role, if appropriate; his or her years of experience as a vice principal; his or her years of experience as a principal; and his or her school’s 2013 API score. Table 7 details the 3-year API growth for each of the participant’s schools including school wide and subgroup scores. As indicated in the table, all participating schools earned a school wide API score of 800 or more.

Findings from 12 interviews are organized according to themes that emerged in the data analysis, including: (a) pathway to the principalship, (b) relationship between vice principal and lead principal, (c) vice principal responsibilities as training for
Table 6

**Principal Participant Job Experience History and Current School Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant name</th>
<th>Preadministrative leadership role</th>
<th>Years as VP/School level</th>
<th>Years as principal/School level</th>
<th>API score 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highly effective principals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Science Staff Developer for SJSD</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trina</td>
<td>Peer Coach/Staff Developer for SJSD</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>963</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>High School Counselor</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>861</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Peer Coach/Staff Developer for SJSD</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Kay</td>
<td>Peer Coach/Staff Developer for SJSD</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>931</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>Science Staff Developer for SJSD</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>863</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>Program Improvement &amp; Planning Department at SJSD</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early career principals</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MaryAnn</td>
<td>Education Specialist at SJSD</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>6 months</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>School Level Parent Academic Liaison</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>6 months</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Trained Principals on Master Schedules for SJSD</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>862</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>6 months</td>
<td>949</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>Peer Coach/Staff Developer for SJSD</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>876</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Weighted 3-Year API Average*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School level</th>
<th>School wide</th>
<th>Black or African American</th>
<th>American Indian or Alaska Native</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino</th>
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<th>English learners</th>
<th>Students with disabilities</th>
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principal responsibilities: operational and instructional, and (d) gaps in leadership training. Through the analysis of data, the researcher gained insight into how previous vice principal duties informed and influenced the current leadership practices of principals.

Pathway to the Principalship

Principal participants described the nature of their pathways to the principalship, both in terms of the trajectory of their own career choices, as well as in the context of school district structures and processes that helped direct those career choices. The career paths of 11 of the 12 participants included what might be called preadministrative leadership positions. Although those roles are not considered formal administrative positions requiring administrative credentials, participants described them as providing an influential link between the teacher and the vice principal reference group. Those positions not only afforded vital training but also provided opportunities for others to notice the participants’ knowledge and skills, which resulted in either a more informal tapping for the vice principalship or a modified succession to the vice principalship. In either case, those early forays into leadership provided an important first stepping-stone along the way to the principalship.

Pathway to the Principalship: Preadministrative Leadership Positions

Preadministrative leadership positions made it possible for 11 participants to separate from their reference group (teachers) and form positive orientations toward the roles and responsibilities of administration. That shift in the organizational environment provided an openness to new work experiences for those individuals and afforded them an orientation toward formal administrative roles and a broader platform from which to
view the work of schools and school districts. Those preadministrative leadership opportunities positively contributed to the role conception and the initial socialization into new communities of practice as vice principals. In addition, the preadministrative positions appeared to ease potential culture shock (Marshall & Greenfield, 1987), as the participants separated from other teachers and oriented themselves to the administrative group.

Preadministrative leadership positions created extended organizational boundaries for 11 of the 12 participants. For example, principals Trina, Lori, Mary Kay, and Dennis served as peer coaches and staff developers with the San Juanita School District after leaving the classroom. Only highly qualified teachers who had distinguished themselves through their work were invited to assume that district role. As peer coaches and staff developers, the participants became curriculum leaders without evaluative authority. Thus, peer coaches and staff developers supported classroom teachers in specific curricular areas, and they worked closely with principals to facilitate school-wide professional development. Stepping out of the classroom helped Trina conceptualize broader leadership roles because she “had the opportunity to work so closely with the administrator for many of the needs of the school, both instructionally and operationally.”

Lori concurred with that perspective, stating:

When I became a staff developer, I got to see the bigger picture of the school, because I was no longer a classroom teacher in my little room. I was really fascinated with the bigger picture of the school, and I really wanted to be someone to help connect everything in the working of the school.

Similarly, Dennis reflected:
I learned by conducting professional development [at the district level], I could do more for more kids. Not just help the kids in my classroom. To me this was intriguing, because I wanted to help make more kids become proficient or advanced.

Mike described his first leadership move, which involved transitioning from being a teacher for 9 years to the role of parent academic liaison at his school. He shared:

[The opportunity] pushed me [toward getting an administrative credential], because I was in the administrative team meetings and saw how to steer an entire campus. It became very intriguing. It made me think that I would like to try administration.

**Pathway to the Principalship: “Tapping”**

As the principals in this study separated from their previous reference group (teachers), they became more engaged in their new group and formed positive orientations toward, and relationships with, the administrative group. Some school districts develop formal succession plans to ensure the advancement of future leaders from within. Those succession management systems are developed so that organizations can effectively identify and promote individuals who demonstrate the competencies to be successful leaders (Myung et al., 2011). The lack of a formal succession plan did not deter the participants in this study from seeking and being identified for leadership roles. Rather, the positive socialization they experienced in their preadministrative roles motivated them to pursue administrative positions. In addition, the continuous sponsorship, administrative mentoring, and positive feedback from those in positions of
influence provided the participants with insights into the administrative culture just as school and district administrators began to recognize their skills and talents.

The pathway to leadership for Steve, MaryAnn, Lori, Dave, and Dennis was indicative of the informal succession plan known as “tapping.” The principals in this study were tapped for leadership roles because they had demonstrated administrative ability and were encouraged to pursue an administrative path. For example, Steve stated, “I had been asked if I wanted to be an administrator by both of my previous principals.” Similarly, MaryAnn recalled, “My mentor really changed my thoughts of what I could do and how I would be an effective administrator in a school. I was really encouraged.” Likewise, Dennis shared, “The principal saw something in me.”

Lori described a similar experience:

The staff actually came to me and asked me to be a staff developer. They wanted me to be that [staff developer] because they knew me, and my work, and I was a mentor teacher for the site. My classroom was like a revolving door anyway. People were in and out, in and out. I worked at that site for 6 years as the staff developer/peer coach.

Likewise, MaryAnn stated:

I was working in the special education department, and I gave support to principals. I realized that I had gotten to the point where I felt I was playing the role of an administrator, and I wanted to know more about how to be a better leader. I was already leading and working conversations that were leading teachers. I felt I was their boss. . . . So, I just felt I needed to have more experience and knowledge about administration. But I always thought I would be
a special education administrator. The [administrative preparation] program made me realize I wanted to be a principal.

Role conception and positive initial socialization into new communities of practice in preadministrative leadership positions appeared to determine the influential links between the teacher role and that of vice principal. Although 11 of the 12 principals interviewed described preadministrative positions they held prior to becoming vice principals, six of those individuals reported that the experiences led to them being tapped for formal administrative positions. Those positive work experiences were a stepping-stone to the role of vice principal, just as the role of vice principal is considered a stepping-stone to that of a principal.

**Pathway to the Principalship: Modified Succession Plans**

At the time of this study, the San Juanita School District did not utilize a formal succession management system. However, the pathway to leadership for Tom and Susan may reflect modified, school-level succession plans. For example, Susan had been a teacher at the school for 8 years prior to becoming its vice principal. She had taken on a leadership role there by volunteering to serve on committees and working beyond contract hours to support students at risk. Because of her vested interest in the school, Susan’s administrator and staff encouraged her to move into a formal leadership position. In addition, with her knowledge of the school’s culture and instructional programs, she could provide leadership continuity and build upon the goals already established by the principal. She decided to “go for it” by pursuing an administrative credential. In this case, the school administrator played an instrumental role in leadership succession by building capacity within his staff and promoting Susan to the vice principal position.
With that leadership strategy, the principal minimized instability by promoting a teacher to vice principal, while also sustaining his own leadership influence. Susan served as vice principal for 11 years before becoming the principal of another school. Susan stated she preferred the vice principal position because she had two young children at home, and serving in that role, instead of as a principal, made it possible for her to spend more time with them. Now that her children are grown, Susan finds she can devote more time to her career.

Like Susan, Tom met his future principal when he worked at the central office. He recalled that he “valued her philosophy of education and her decision-making priorities.” He added, “So, I just approached her and asked her if she would be interested in having me be her vice principal someday.” When the vice principalship opened up at her school, the principal hired him. Tom worked side by side with his lead principal for 6 years before becoming the principal of that school. Serving as vice principal, Tom worked closely with the cluster of three elementary schools, two middle schools, and the high school within his school’s feeder pattern. He stated that he believed his involvement in the digital literacy plan for his community of schools led to his promotion. Although there was no formal district-level succession plan, Tom’s working knowledge of critical school community issues, as well as his belief in the goals and philosophy of the former principal, created an opportunity for him to be acknowledged and invited to step up as a leader who would help sustain systems he had helped create at the school.

**The Relationship Between Vice Principal and Lead Principal**

Because of educational reforms, a focus on improving instruction, and the immensity of the principal’s job, the roles and responsibilities for vice principals have
shifted from exclusively operational tasks to, in part, instructional functions (Kwan, 2009b). Lead principals have opportunities to encourage leadership experiences for vice principals. Data derived from this study reveal that trusting relationships between lead principals and their vice principals—and authentic opportunities for the latter to demonstrate leadership—influenced the types of responsibilities and functions vice principals assumed.

A Positive Relationship With the Lead Principal

All principals interviewed asserted that their lead principals helped them grow as leaders. Each interviewee reflected on how her or his lead principal’s ability to build positive, collaborative working conditions through strong communication influenced the degree to which the principal released responsibility to his or her vice principal(s). By way of example, Tom stated:

My principal trusted me. We could have very open conversations about what worked and what did not work. . . . We had a lot of conversations about the work she was doing and lots of conversations about the work I was doing. There was . . . dialogue going back and forth, so I was exposed to ideas. She was open to me trying on almost anything I wanted. Her openness was great. She trusted me. She believed in doing the work in a collaborative model as opposed to [in] isolation. We did a lot of tasks together, and I think that working together was the best way I could learn from her.

Echoing a similar perspective, Susan shared:

There was a very high level of trust and a very positive environment to work in. He basically let me be in charge of everything. Not everything, but if I was in
charge of something, he would not say a thing, interfere, anything. It was like I was running whatever that area was.

Susan stepped outside the traditional vice principal role and was given a chance to develop an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of administration. As she was afforded opportunities for autonomous action, she rehearsed various leadership functions while under the guidance and support of her lead principal. Through this professional socialization process, she learned the skills, knowledge, and dispositions required of principals.

Mike reflected on a similar experience with his own principal and noted, “She gave me a lot of leash but wanted to monitor [me] and make sure things were going the right way. There was trust. She trusted me, but she wanted to see results.” Mike’s principal appeared to mentor with a balanced approach, providing ongoing support while also setting high expectations. The job-embedded learning challenges provided an opportunity for Mike to take leadership risks in a relatively safe environment.

Also reflecting on his relationship with the lead principal, Dave stated:

She trusted me from the beginning, because she had known what I had done at my other site. But at the same time, there was a huge learning experience, but it was completely for the positive, because I was involved in everything, all the decision making. We would question each other back and forth, but it was more on the learning spectrum . . . versus just trying to fit into a role. She was very open to someone coming in to see it different as well as the same. She allowed me to grow that vision of what was working and what was not working. We did it as a team, the two of us, and that was awesome!
Dennis was likewise thoughtful as he spoke of his lead principal. He said, “Her idea was to groom me to be the next principal [of the school].” He elaborated that his lead principal “found his strengths and tapped into them.” He also noted that she explicitly stated, “The biggest thing is that our administrative team members have trust.”

**Principal Leadership Styles and Opportunities for Vice Principal Leadership**

More than half the principals interviewed for this study worked with two lead principals during the time they served as vice principals. The differences in leadership styles with multiple lead principals presented opportunities that proved to be beneficial, even if they were less than perfect. For example, Sam explained that (as a vice principal) he was “lucky” to work with two principals. He stated, “They were both very open in wanting to mentor me, so that was very helpful.”

Sam had a somewhat different perspective. He elaborated on the inability of his second principal to release responsibility to him as a vice principal:

He was very hands-off, in a way, with instructional practice. We had our own subject areas or departments that we oversaw, and the principal’s stance was those content areas were our responsibility. As long as our leadership of them resulted in positive growth in achievement, then we had pretty much free rein as to how we wanted to guide, direct, and support the teachers and instruction and priorities. The flip [side] of that was the promise that if achievement wasn’t showing positive growth, then he would step in and dictate to us what the direction and priorities were. We would then carry those out, which is a very different role. Having the opportunities to really take full ownership of the academic
achievement of certain departments, and full control over PD opportunities and concepts, was a great experience.

In a similar mode, Lori made the following analogy regarding her relationship with the second lead principal she worked with. “We were like running partners,” she said, adding that even though they had some differences of opinion, they could work through, even leverage, their differences for the good of their school. Elaborating, she commented:

We had wonderful professional discourse around those different opinions, and it really helped us think from these different perspectives. We felt comfortable enough with each other to have arguments to support our thinking and our way of doing something. I did not consider myself a VP when I worked with her. I felt we were partners. She was open to allow different points of view and approaches.

The relationship Lori had with her first lead principal resulted in a very different experience and relationship. She indicated her first principal was controlling, and she stated, “I was not given opportunities that I felt a vice principal should have.” Lori noted that her principal had been the leader of the school for a “very, very long time. She ran a tight ship.” She added, “We had extreme differences in personalities. She respected my work, but I was not allowed to go beyond what she knew I could do because of the control [issues].”

Susan also worked with two principals while she was a vice principal. She recalled that when she and her first principal worked together, the principal released so much responsibility to her, she felt she “was in charge of everything.” Susan added that he would allow her to be “in charge of things, and I never really [messed] anything up.”
However, she said she also came to believe, “Maybe if I had [messed] things up, he would have stepped in [to make corrections].” The dynamic between them created a “positive environment” for Susan.

Nine years later, her first principal was promoted to a district-level position, and Susan commenced working with a second lead principal at the same school. She recalled that although the new principal was experienced, his leadership style was different than his predecessor’s. Susan explained how working for the second principal was completely unlike collaborating with the first, and how the partnership was less fulfilling. She said:

He [the second principal] would call us in and run . . . leadership seminars for us. Basically, it was . . . grilling and quizzing us on stuff, and we would sit there for 2 hours. He would make diagrams on the white board. . . . It was like a training seminar.

The second principal’s attempts to build his leadership team were less about learning by doing, and, Susan recalled, when he did release responsibility, “he would also give me a lot of feedback on what I was not doing quite right.” Although she was less fulfilled in her relationship with her second principal, Susan acknowledged the value of learning from different leaders. She stated, “You learn so much from different leadership styles of the different principals.” She added, “You learn from [one principal’s] methods and then have someone else . . . to compare. Every principal that comes in, you learn new things.”

As a vice principal, Mary Kay also worked for two lead principals. Her experience with the first principal she partnered with was not the sort of learning opportunity she preferred. She recalled:
I had two [lead] principals, and both of them [mentored] in different ways. I got more out of one than the other. My first principal was very strong in . . . instructional leadership. . . . We would have these meetings on the school focus, the instructional leadership, changing the practice—there were lots of charts. It was almost too weighted in that [direction], so I did not learn a lot there about talking to parents, and I feel that is a really fun part of my job and a real strength of mine. I did not have creative license.

As a vice principal, Mary Kay experienced a professional relationship with her second principal that was more productive and rewarding for her. Recalling their collaboration, she said, “My second principal brought me in on everything, everything he could. He would release things to us [the two vice principals]. He would release responsibility to us.”

It appears that Mary Kay’s first principal, similar to Susan’s second principal, relied on a heavy-handed, do-as-I-say approach to mentorship. Although the focus was on learning, the delivery was one-dimensional, leaving out important partners that Mary Kay deemed essential to the learning process—that is, parents. Her second principal appeared to mentor by example, inviting Mary Kay in to participate in all aspects of the work.

The lead principal-vice principal relationship influenced the career paths of the participants in this study. Susan, Mary Kay, and Lori experienced positive, trusting relationships with their lead principals, relationships that enabled each of them to move forward on her path to a principalship. Reflecting on that key relationship, Lori shared:
I did not even consider myself as a vice principal when I worked with her [the second principal]. I felt we were partners because she was open and allowed different points of view and approaches. She allowed it [trust] to happen.

Steve commented that his first mentor principal “referred to us [three VPs] as co-principals, so there was a real strong relationship where we could communicate back and forth.” After 3 years working with his first principal, Steve decided to transfer to a different school “to develop some different skill sets” with another leader. He stated that his first principal had been “phenomenal with data and budget.”

Unlike the other principals interviewed for this study, Dave and Mike shared the same lead principal, Susan. According to Dave, Susan identified the strengths of her two vice principals and shaped their duties in sync with those individual strengths by creating an organizational chart that delineated specific responsibilities for each vice principal. Dave recalled, “We [he and the principal] had conversations on the instructional side of the house and not so much on the operational side. The other VP was not involved in some of those instructional decisions.”

Two years later, Dave transferred to another middle school as a vice principal. He recalled that the relationship with his second principal was built via collaboration. The two of them worked closely, making decisions together. He stated, “I was involved in everything, all the decision making.” Two years later, Dave’s first lead principal, Susan, retired. He decided to apply to be the principal, and he got the job—and Mike became his vice principal. Mike reflected on their new professional relationship:

It was more of a partnership because we both came up [were VPs] together, so I think we both got a lot of that same mentoring, the same conversations, and the
same ideals. We already knew how to work together and knew what each other [was] about. We were always communicating, but it was just us. We didn’t have someone on high that had 25 years of experience doing this. It was us!

After a year of working again with Dave, Mike became the principal at another school.

According to the principals interviewed for this study, their relationships with their lead principals facilitated their own leadership development. In most cases, the lead principals supported their vice principals in becoming leadership partners by providing opportunities for them to make decisions while under their tutelage. If the role of the vice principal is the stepping-stone to leadership, then that leadership opportunity also served as a pathway into the principalship. For example, Gloria stated that her principal assigned her duties and allowed her to “figure them out.” Sharing that her principal assigned her the responsibility of supporting the special education department at her middle school, she stated:

I used data and we started scheduling students in a completely different way. I used a team approach with that [special education] team. By having a team approach, we were more solid on how we placed students with special needs. Before, there wasn’t a lot of collaboration. By deciding how to schedule students, we were able to begin the work together.

By assigning Gloria the task of working with the special education department, her lead principal contributed to her learning and facilitated her development as a leader. Gloria learned how to use data to build teachers’ knowledge of specific students’ needs. As she invited teachers into the decision-making process, she fostered their sense of ownership over the new data-informed student scheduling process. As Gloria stretched
her own leadership skills, she simultaneously developed leadership capacity within the special education team.

Similarly, Tom shared that, as a vice principal, it was his job to coordinate the development of a school cluster’s (a group of schools within a certain geographic area) digital literacy plan. He stated that working on this project facilitated his leadership and explained:

[The project] involved a lot of collaboration with people and, in this case, they were staff members from different sites [in the area]. The decision-making process included consensus building, and the project really gave me a taste of what it means to coordinate something at a larger level. It [involved] a lot of people who do not agree and, at the same time [had to] work together to stay focused.

Tom stated that this opportunity informed his current work as a principal because:

A lot of the work I do right now involves getting a group of people together and trying to get them motivated to be on the same page about a goal and then to create a plan and implement it. The work I did with the teachers in the cluster to develop the digital literacy plan is similar to the work I do with the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to develop the instructional plan for my middle school.

These examples show how taking advantage of leadership opportunities helped vice principals build leadership skills necessary for the principalship. The relationships lead principals established with their vice principals significantly influenced the socialization process. Through collaboration and shared decision-making, the lead principals developed partnerships with their vice principals, thus strengthening the vice
principals’ leadership qualifications and abilities. The lead principals in this study played a substantial role in developing the leadership skills of their vice principals; they became principal makers.

**Vice Principal Responsibilities as Training for Principal**

**Responsibilities: Operations and Instruction**

Recent research confirmed that the traditional professional identity of the vice principal remained largely unchanged since 1994 (Sun, 2012). Despite that, Sun’s (2012) research also provided quantitative and qualitative data indicating that vice principal involvement in instruction-related tasks had increased. All participants in the current study empathically stated that everything they did as vice principals contributed to their current role (identity) as principals, including all things instructional and operational. It is important to note that the principals who served as vice principals at the elementary level reported having more experience with instructional matters than those who served as vice principals at the middle or high school levels.

Operational matters included the daily workings of a school, such as safety, discipline, and scheduling tasks. Instructional issues included the professional development of teachers, classroom observations, and teacher evaluations—matters that directly influenced student achievement. The participants approached the position of vice principal by applying previously established skills as they learned new ones. Through their work as vice principals, they developed their leadership voices and polished communication skills as they fulfilled their operational and instructional responsibilities with various stakeholders. In addition, the participants learned how to network with district personnel and build relationships that would later serve them as principals. As
vice principals, they discovered the magnitude of their new leadership responsibilities when they were given master keys to their sites. For example, Mary Kay shared:

I guess it begins when you have a master key to the school, so you are in charge of the school. Everything I did as a VP, from opening up in the morning, to making sure the cafeteria was running, to getting kids into classrooms, helps me now. I did it all. All of this is preparing you to be a principal, because, if you are at your own school and you do not have a VP, you are going to be doing all these things anyway.

Serving as vice principal proved to be invaluable training for the future role of principal. As the participants strengthened their communication skills, they simultaneously socialized into the new community of administration, which made it possible for them to facilitate action on both operational and instructional matters. Developing a leadership voice was necessary for each vice principal who was determined to overcome the “hurdles” and “become part of the organizational culture.”

**Communicating Beliefs and Demonstrating Competence**

Participants used the position of vice principal as an opportunity to improve communication skills. As vice principals, they learned district policy and acquired cultural awareness already established at their schools. In addition, they developed the confidence to convey messages, both positive and negative, to stakeholders and learned to use all encounters as opportunities to communicate beliefs and goals. While serving as a vice principal, Susan learned the skill of communicating clearly and succinctly with all stakeholders. She reflected:
Calling parents and having difficult conversations is a skill you learn as a VP at a middle school. By the end of my VP tenure, I never felt uncomfortable about talking to parents about difficult things. You learn how to do it in a way that clearly explains your point of view and reduces the parents’ anxiety and frustration and anger. That is a really important skill for principals, knowing how to handle difficult conversations.

Similarly, MaryAnn stated, “I learned how to have difficult conversations with teachers, parents, and students as a vice principal.” Likewise, Sam recalled that his previous training as a teacher, a school counselor, and a vice principal positively contributed to his leadership practice as a principal, especially in terms of understanding and communicating with his staff. He noted:

Being a VP was helpful because as principal you understand and know the job [of being principal]. It was also helpful to have been a teacher and a counselor. As a result, I have a really good sense of how high of expectations are realistic and what work I am expecting of staff, as opposed to what a person is willing to contribute or give.

Tom succinctly indicated that his work as a vice principal positively contributed to his ability to clearly communicate with stakeholders. He stated:

The idea of knowing how to share ideas with people and get their feedback, to create an implementation plan and checking to see if we are moving forward or not, you need all those skills to be successful as a vice principal. It is just the same as a principal—it is just that it is in a more amplified environment as a principal.
As vice principals, participants cultivated the advanced communication skills required to motivate and build commitment among stakeholders. They listened, asked questions, and demonstrated respect and acceptance of others while also working to improve their schools. In an effort to influence others, the participants developed a strong sense of self. They learned to articulate their beliefs and values in every conversation. Gloria shared that before any vice principal learns the skills of the job, he or she must have a “strong sense of their own beliefs and values.” She added:

All of the skills, all of the tasks you do are all related to what you believe. You have to have an understanding of who you are at the core of your being and what you want for the community you work with. I find the things that come out of my mouth are the things I value the most.

As vice principals, the participants used daily interactions with various stakeholders to advance the goals of their schools. Those daily encounters helped them center the work on shared values, which entailed clearly communicating their own, while simultaneously demonstrating sensitivity to the perspectives of others. Participants also commented on building stakeholder confidence in their competence as leaders.

Instructionally, Lori provided professional development for the entire school. Her principal had confidence in Lori because of the 7 years she had spent as a peer coach and staff developer, as well as their “running partner” relationship, both of which she had leveraged to influence student achievement.

Reflecting on how he had worked to develop expert knowledge regarding district policies and regulations, Sam stated:
Being a vice principal felt like being on the frontlines of working with district policy. I had to know it in order to work with and support different stakeholders. They expect you to know policies and regulations really well and closely.

**Building Networks to Support the Work**

As vice principals, the participants learned how to navigate the layers of departments and personnel within the district office to resolve problems and realize progress on instructional and organizational matters. For example, Trina stated that as a vice principal she “dealt with a lot of special education issues.” She recalled building a network of support to maximize her understanding of special education. Trina explained:

> As a VP, I learned all about what to do as an administrator in all IEP (Individualize Education Plan) meetings, what my role was, and how to get answers and supports that I needed. I learned about networking at the district level as a vice principal. That helped me—it helps me now.

As a vice principal, Lori was in an unusual situation. Her school was located on two campuses separated by a city block. The principal’s office was located on the main portion of the campus, and Lori’s office was located down the block on the other campus. Lori was the vice principal of one school, but she was also responsible for her campus. She explained:

> I actually got to run it [the second campus] like a mini-school, and I did everything I thought a principal would do. It was good because we [Lori and the principal] knew how to work with each other. I was always right there in everything. That gave me a lot of learning [about] what a principal does.
Operationally, Lori was able to build a network of district contacts because she was acting as a co-principal. She stated:

I met with different district personnel for various things, since I was the overseer of one side of the campus. I met with maintenance people and talked about what needed to happen at that school, what needed to be upgraded and things of that sort.

Susan noted that the contacts she made as a vice principal also served her as a principal. She said, “I don’t think anyone ever talks about how important it is to make connections in the district [as a vice principal]. You build a network of folks to call when you have a question or need advice.” Sam shared that as a vice principal he “learned to pull [district] resources together” to support teachers and students. As vice principals, the participants reached out to district personnel and established relationships with staffers who possessed different skill sets. By doing so, they learned to value the expertise of others while also strengthening their own leadership skills.

The participants in this study believed their responsibilities as vice principals provided significant training, both instructional and operational, for their subsequent responsibilities as principals. By strengthening their communication skills and finding their leadership voices, they were able to build relationships with diverse stakeholders, motivate followers, and lead assertively, relying on their own values as a compass for their actions. They also learned how to network with district-level personnel. The degree to which participants had opportunities to master both operational- and instructional-related knowledge and skills while serving as vice principals influenced whether they were prepared to subsequently assume responsibilities on both sides of the school.
leadership wheelhouse. Some indicated they wished there had been more opportunities for them to lead instructional improvement efforts as vice principals. Those and other gaps in training at the vice principal level are detailed in the next section of this chapter.

**Gaps in Leadership Training**

All the participants in this study believed that work as vice principals, prior to their becoming principals, provided invaluable leadership training. However, many of them also believed there were gaps in their leadership experiences during the time they served as vice principals. As they reflected on their training, some stated they had desired more direct experience in four key areas: budget, instruction, special education, and human resources.

Table 8 details the participants’ years of experience, the duties and responsibilities they assumed as vice principals that contributed to their preparedness for assuming a principalship, and the duties and responsibilities they wish they had experienced as vice principals.

**Budgetary Issues**

MaryAnn, Trina, Lori, Dave, Sam, Mary Kay, and Gloria indicated that additional training in budgetary issues would have better prepared them for their current responsibilities as principal. For example, Trina stated:

I had [virtually] no experience with budget and some of those operational things. It would have been nice to have been exposed to the budget and all the different budget strings, including what you use for what, how you make decisions, and the actual software program. My principal held herself in her office for several weeks...
Table 8

_Gaps in Participant Principal Learning_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years as principal</th>
<th>VP duties and responsibilities contribute to my leadership as principal</th>
<th>Gaps in training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Everything contributed to my role now as a principal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Ann</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Every conversation I had as a VP, every responsibility—I have used that experience.</td>
<td>Budget training, Formal teacher evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trina*</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Even the minutiae, such as bus duty, helped in my learning.</td>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>The second position as a VP was great! It did prepare me to be a principal, because I did everything and made decisions.</td>
<td>Budget training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>I cannot think of anything because even some of the more basic disciplinary types of things, I still see them as being supportive because they still helped me learn how to best work with students and parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Every experience helped me as a principal.</td>
<td>Budget training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>As a principal, I am responsible for the whole school. So I have to know everything. I need to be aware of what I am asking people to do. Everything I did as a VP was important.</td>
<td>Instructional leadership, Human resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years as principal</th>
<th>VP duties and responsibilities contribute to my leadership as principal</th>
<th>Gaps in training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan*</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>As a VP, I tended to do things that were not necessarily in my job description or would be considered a waste of time because they were clerical. But sometimes there is no one to do stuff, so our time was increasingly taken up with things that were not vice principal work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Kay*</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Everything I did as a VP contributed to me being a principal.</td>
<td>Budget training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike*</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>There was value in everything I did as a VP.</td>
<td>Master scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Special education training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Everything you do on your job as VP helps prepare you.</td>
<td>Special education training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria*</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Sometimes I think there were too many people on supervision, especially at assemblies. Sometimes the administration meetings were too long. Some of the things could have been done via email.</td>
<td>Budget training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disciplinary procedures</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Special education training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Principals who were vice principals at middle or high schools and now serve as principals at elementary schools.
and did budget while I was running the school, so it would be nice to be a part of that as a training opportunity.

Sam shared that perspective, noting, “The budgets were always a fear, and I think it is a fear for many of us [principals]. I did not feel I got enough experience working with a budget.” Mary Kay concurred, saying, “I did not learn or pay attention to the budget [as a VP] because the principal did that, and the budget is still a hard thing for me as a principal. Luckily, I am not afraid to ask questions.”

MaryAnn acknowledged the responsibility of spending site money wisely for the greater good of students and the school. She commented:

I did not understand it, so as a new principal, I had to learn really quickly all about the budget and how to spend your money. You have to know how to engage in those conversations with teachers and parents.

Seven of the 12 participants stated that they lacked specific budgetary training when they served as vice principals. Although most of them reported being quick learners, this gap in knowledge directly influences both instructional and operational concerns at a school. According to the California Department of Education’s new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), schools are required to involve all stakeholders in a collective and transparent budget process. The LCFF was designed by the state legislature to allow school districts more flexibility in allocating their resources. Individual school leaders are expected to work with their stakeholders to craft priority spending lists in sync with addressing the achievement gap and Common Core curriculum. Participants in this study acknowledged that during these challenging
financial times, principals must have a firm understanding of school budgets so that they can best serve their students’ needs.

**Instructional Leadership**

As detailed in Table 8, six of the principals wished they had gained more leadership experience around instruction while working as vice principals in middle schools. They stated that operational issues, especially discipline, often dominated their time. However, three principals who had served as vice principals at elementary schools gave no indication they had desired more instructional training during their tenure as vice principals. Nor did they signal that discipline-related issues consumed their workdays.

Trina, who worked as a middle school vice principal, recalled:

> I wish I had had more time as an instructional leader as a VP. I had no time to get into the classrooms. And that was my expertise—I was a teacher. I know instruction. That is what I have always wanted to do at middle school. Discipline pretty much took over.

Trina’s middle school experience is in sync with the experiences of other principal participants who served as vice principals at middle or high schools. They became so bogged down with student discipline issues, there was little time during the day to support teaching and learning. According to the participants in this study, discipline issues involved three separate procedures:

- Investigation—obtaining statements from victims, witnesses, and perpetrators.
- Communication—contacting parents of all involved in the incident and possibly contacting district-related personnel about the incident.
• Documentation—recording a written statement documenting the incident and the participants in the incident.

Depending on the nature of the situation, this process could consume 2 hours per incident for a middle or high school vice principal. In addition to addressing discipline issues, vice principals often communicate with parents regarding the academic standing of students. Although Trina had once been a peer coach and staff developer, she noted, “I had no time [as a middle school vice principal] to get into the classrooms. And, that was my expertise. I know instruction. I always wanted to work with teachers on instruction at the middle school.”

Trina is currently a principal at an elementary school. “Moving to middle from elementary school was a big shift, discipline-wise,” she recalled. “I have more time for instruction now, because we have fewer discipline issues.” Trina’s typical day as an elementary principal consists of collaborating with teachers on the instructional focus at her site. She shared, “I get into classrooms daily, and go to every single one of our Professional Learning Community (PLCs) meetings during the week.” The difference between the middle or high school and the elementary vice principal experience is astounding in that the district focus for the SJSD administrators across all school sites is instructional leadership. Discipline issues aside, the experience of serving as a middle school vice principal enhanced those participants’ communication skills, thereby preparing them to work with all stakeholders. Although they desired more instructional leadership opportunities, they maximized the opportunities to sharpen their communication skills.
Tom, who served as a middle school vice principal, is currently the principal of a middle school. To support his belief that time allocated to instruction is dependent on the focus of the lead principal, he stated:

I needed more time with instruction [as a vice principal]. The experiences you get as a VP are directly tied to who the principal is. As a VP, you do not know what you do not know. In hindsight, I needed to have spent more time specifically with language arts and mathematics.

Although Tom highly revered his lead principal and credits her for providing him with diverse experiences as a middle school vice principal, he wishes he had been better prepared for instructional leadership in mathematics and language arts. To strengthen his leadership in those areas, Tom sought instructional guidance from and supportive partnerships with his principal colleagues. He explained:

I rely heavily upon Jack [a principal at another middle school]. He is very knowledgeable in the area of instruction. Also, Jack’s perspectives on education are different from mine, so it is good—I love opposing perspectives—it is good to hear what he has to say. My wife is also a principal. Sometimes I call her once or twice a day and ask her questions.

Tom recognizes the support he needs in terms of instructional leadership. His willingness to network with others to assist him as he grows professionally is indicative of many middle or high school principals who did not experience instructional leadership as vice principals. Tom expressed the desire to improve his leadership skills and pursued answers to his own questions in an effort to develop expertise.
Like Tom, Susan did not expand her instructional leadership as a middle school vice principal. She attributed her lack of instructional training to the district, noting:

The district does a pretty haphazard job of training VPs on instruction. At one point they [the district] were only training VPs in operations. Then, at other points, the two VPs at my school were alternating months of going with the principal to the district training. So, we were missing every other training session. The district should place more value on VPs. They are our future leaders. They need just as much training in instructional issues as principals, because then you are going to end up with a bunch of VPs who are very good at operational tasks but do not really know how to lead instruction.

As the principal of an elementary school, Susan visited classrooms daily, providing feedback to teachers as she developed the instructional systems at her school. She said she was able to focus her work with teachers on “Common Core, instruction, and professional development.” She attended monthly meetings with her administrative colleagues and read constantly to fill in the instructional leadership gaps. Susan also had a vice principal working in tandem with her. She acknowledged that her vice principal was not trained in either instructional or operational matters. “He is new, new,” she said. Susan noted that her vice principal would spend the school year focusing on the operational aspect of the school. However, she added that her plan for the next year involved focusing their work on instructional leadership. She insisted that her vice principal must attend all instructional leadership training the district offered. Susan’s ability to identify her own weakness in terms of instructional expertise, pinpoint the
cause, and remedy the situation with a plan for her own improvement demonstrates important leadership strength.

Mike also served as a middle school vice principal, and at the time of the study, he was a principal at an elementary school. He expressed similar feelings about needing instructional training when he said:

As a middle school VP, being an instructional leader was not the biggest part of the job. I was on the operational side of the house. I was at a school that had two VPs, and then we had one, me. I was spread pretty thin. I did a lot of things to keep us in compliance but did not focus on the instructional side of the house.

Mike realized that the lead principal at his middle school focused Mike’s work on the operational “side of the house.” She valued the operational responsibilities he took on, which allowed him to see the “big picture” of the inner workings of a school. He said his lead principal wanted, him “to get his hands dirty and wanted me to see the good, the bad, and the ugly [side of school] and to take a piece of everything.” However, Mike expressed his concern over his lack of experience on “the instructional side of the house.” He said he wished he “had more exposure to what quality instruction looks like, how to facilitate capacity at a site, how to get people on board, how to train people in quality instruction.” Mike thoughtfully shared his worries that the professional development at his current site is not as “powerful” as it could be. Similar to the other administrators who participated in this study, Mike was earnest in his endeavors to become a skilled instructional leader. His former lead principal committed to mentoring Mike as he worked to build the knowledge to become an effective instructional leader at his
elementary school. Mike’s eagerness to learn key aspects of instruction was a significant leadership asset.

Mike was the only principal in the study who spoke of experiencing loneliness while on the job as principal. During his career, Mike had worked collaboratively with colleagues. He asserted that he has worked alone only in his current role as principal, noting, “I miss having a sounding board, and really having someone that says, ‘Hey, I’m on your side. I have your back.’” He continued:

I had those same people [his administrative team] for almost 7 years. I am pretty sure I wouldn’t be able to do this job if I hadn’t had that continuity. I needed that; some people probably don’t, but I needed that [camaraderie and colleagueship]. It helped me feel confident.

Mike’s ability to honestly communicate his strengths and areas of need is likely to inspire his teachers to regard him as a leader. He has the support of his former lead principal and a passion for learning, both of which fuel Mike’s determination to grow his instructional leadership skills. His tenure as a vice principal gave him a voice—a voice of compassion and courage informed by his commitment to always remain a learner.

Like Mike, Gloria is a former vice principal at a middle school who, at the time of the study, was a principal at an elementary school. She, too, wished she had spent more time in classrooms because “being in classrooms positively impacts school discipline.”

Also currently serving as an elementary school principal, Mary Kay recalled that her administrative program emphasized instructional leadership. She stated:

Everything as far as the instructional piece, I learned that in my [administrative preparation] program. That was the big push at the time, the instructional
leadership piece. That is really why I wanted to be a principal. I wanted to
support teachers, teaching, and learning.

Although she did participate in some instructional work as a vice principal, Mary Kay
explained, “As a vice principal, I only got to do a little bit of that. I guess that the biggest
difference now is I have more time to do what I can do and what I want to do [as
principal].”

Two participants who were vice principals at elementary schools did not comment
on the lack of instructional leadership training. Dennis recalled that during his first year
as a vice principal, his lead principal focused his training on budgetary issues. He stated,
“She put me on the School Site Council [SSC], the leadership advisory team for the
school.” He added, “She found out what my strengths were and tapped into those. I had
been working in science professional development, so she just kept me doing what I knew
how to do.” Dennis indicated that his tenure as a vice principal, in addition to his work
with the lead principal, prepared him for his current role as principal. He said:

I found that she [the lead principal] had given me all of the tools and exposed me
to enough things to where I saw the bigger picture of school leadership. She
thought I was ready after my first year as a vice principal, but thought I needed an
extra year to fine-tune some things.

Lori addressed the instructional piece from a different perspective. She shared
that her work as a peer coach and staff developer at an elementary school for 6 years
before she became a vice principal made it possible for her to work closely with teachers
on instruction. Although she assumed significant responsibility for students with special
needs, the focus was always on instruction. As mentioned previously, Lori also mastered the operation of a school site while serving as a vice principal.

MaryAnn was a vice principal for 7 months at an elementary school. During her short tenure, she considered having no experience with formal teacher evaluations to be her most significant leadership gap. She explained:

I think, because my experience as a vice principal was so short, I did not give evaluations to teachers. I did not do formal evaluations. The evaluations I did give were more about positive construction, not always about things they needed to improve upon.

Although MaryAnn had expertise in special education, she did not have much experience with instructional practices when she became a vice principal. Her lead principal had much faith in MaryAnn’s abilities as a school leader. MaryAnn reflected:

She [the lead principal] was there to support me, and we worked together. But then she said, ‘It’s your turn to take it [school leadership] on.’” So I did. It was like jumping into the deep end of a pool. She gave me the opportunity to do it.

According to the former middle and high school participants in this study, their work as vice principals enabled them to learn the operational aspects of a school setting. They felt confident to move forward as principals because they understood operations. However, three factors contributed to the gaps they experienced in terms of instructional leadership. First, they lacked direct training from their lead principals in instructional leadership. Second, because of pervasive discipline issues at middle and high schools, the focus shifted from instructional matters to discipline or operational tasks. Third, the SJSD failed to consistently include vice principals in professional development that
centered on instructional leadership. The two participants who served as vice principals at elementary schools did not comment on having difficulty with instructional matters, because each had walked into the vice principalship knowledgeable about instruction and with ample opportunities to apply that knowledge.

Although the middle school participants experienced gaps in their instructional leadership, all had gained experience as elementary teachers. They spoke about the importance of this background knowledge, in teaching and learning at the elementary level, as a solid foundation for building their skills in instructional matters.

**Special Education and Human Resources**

Typically, special education and human resources departments have complicated policies and systems that require specific knowledge and understanding. Developing expertise in those areas takes time and focused training. According to several of the participants in the study, lacking a clear understanding of policies and procedures was both frustrating and challenging. Those participants said they wished they had gained more experience in those areas as vice principals. Mike stated, “I needed more experience in special education. I would have liked to spend time with a special education expert to get the philosophy. I feel I had to fill those holes in my learning myself.” Dennis had a similar perspective and said he had wanted to spend “more time in special education.” He explained, “[Doing so] would have given me insights of what’s a no-no and what’s okay.”

The participants referred to special education as encompassing both instructional and operational components of a school. The participants wanted to have a more thorough understanding of the inner workings of special education to instill self-
confidence, because they were the administrators overseeing that department. The ability to determine “what’s a no-no,” as Mike mentioned, has legal ramifications that could impact a school and/or a school district. In addition, the participants acknowledged gaps in their understanding of how to provide strategic academic support to students with specific learning disabilities. The gaps in training and support involving special education compromise an administrator’s ability to meet the needs of all students.

Like policies and procedures linking to special education, those that apply to human resources issues vary within school districts. Navigating the procedures and understanding the policies require training and direct experience. Tom and Mary Kay both indicated they would have valued more leadership training in terms of human resources. Mary Kay was candid when she stated:

I did not have to post and bid [the process of hiring someone] as a vice principal. I was included in all the conversations, interviews. The principal always wanted my input, but I never did any of that [actually hiring], so I did not know how to post a position. Luckily, I am at a school that does not have a lot of turnover. I had to post a position last year, so I had to call people and ask what to do.

Mary Kay utilized her networking skills with district-level personnel and her principal colleagues to find the answers she sought. Although she had gaps in her training around human resources issues, she did not let those gaps deter her from obtaining the information she needed to ensure personnel at her site.

Similarly, Tom shared that as a vice principal he and his mentor principal had conversations about personnel issues. However, he added that he was not involved directly with the human resources department and stated:
My mentor principal and I had conversations involved with human resources, but it is one thing to talk about it and another thing to do it. I am not sure how I could task my VPs with some of the human resource duties I have now as a principal. I do not even think that would be appropriate. I do not know how to handle that learning curve I am still facing, which in this case is the area of personnel.

Even as Tom comprehended his own learning gap as a principal in the context of human resources, he was also cognizant of the gap with human resources-related responsibilities he experienced as a vice principal. Reflecting on those gaps, Tom expressed the duality of his role as principal: First, he is a principal who requires information to fulfill his own responsibilities as a leader. In addition, he is the lead principal, and as such he is responsible for developing the leadership skills of two future principals.

**Summary**

The goal of this study was to determine how previous vice principal duties inform and influence the current leadership practices of principals. The central themes that emerged from analysis of the interview data include: (a) pathway to the principalship, (b) relationship between vice principal and lead principal, (c) vice principal responsibilities as training for principal responsibilities, both operational and instructional, and (d) gaps in leadership training. Ultimately, the data highlighted how principal participants made meaning from their vice principal work experiences and the specific ways in which they came to understand those experiences as principal apprenticeship opportunities. In addition, the data revealed gaps in the participants’ leadership experiences as vice principals, underscoring those areas participants felt least
confident about: budgetary issues and instructional leadership, as well as issues involving special education and human resources.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of significant findings. In addition, limitations of the study are detailed, and the chapter also presents recommendations for those involved in education reform, as well as directions for future research.
CHAPTER 5—SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 5 summarizes this study’s findings, presents recommendations for those involved in education reform, and provides directions for future research. The study sought to increase understanding of how the work experiences of vice principals can be better leveraged as apprenticeship opportunities for future principals. The researcher adhered to characteristics of qualitative research detailed by Plano Clark and Creswell (2010) and utilized a phenomenological research design to “describe the essential aspects of the experiences” (p. 238) of principals when they served as vice principals. The researcher strived to highlight principals’ actual experiences while they served as vice principals.

For purposes of this study, the phenomenon of interest was the work life of vice principals, especially as it afforded learning opportunities for future leaders. The phenomenological approach sought to help principals understand how the roles and responsibilities of vice principals helps prepare those individuals to assume the duties of a principalship. The researcher conducted semi-structured individual interviews with 12 participants, 9 elementary principals (3 male and 3 female) and 3 male middle school principals. Nine of the principals served as vice principals at middle schools prior to becoming principals. Of those nine, three became principals at middle schools, while the other six became principals at elementary schools. Seven of the 12 principals were deemed highly effective, as they had served in their current roles for at least 2 years while also maintaining an API score of 800 or higher. Five of the 12 also served as principals of schools earning API scores of 800 or higher but had contributed as principals for less than 1 year. As early-career principals, the leaders had relatively fresh recall of their
experiences as vice principals. The experientially diverse participants provided the researcher with significant opportunities to learn about the phenomenon under study.

This chapter summarizes findings from 12 in-depth interviews conducted with principals as they described how duties they performed previously while serving as vice principal informed and influenced their current leadership practices. Four primary themes emerged from the data analysis, including: (a) pathway to the principalship, (b) relationships between vice principals and their lead principals, (c) vice principal responsibility as training for principal responsibilities, both operational and instructional, and (d) gaps in leadership training. Following a brief review of the study context and focus, those themes will be revisited in regard to the research questions framed within this study.

**Context**

Although there seems to be an increase in research focused on the role of vice principals, there is little exploration regarding the link between the roles and responsibilities of vice principals as they apply to the principalship. An emerging body of research, as synthesized and critiqued in the literature review, provides evidence that vice principals play a significant role in the school setting and make substantial contributions to operations. However, the limited number of studies delineating the career pathway from vice principalship to principalship signals a missed opportunity for deepening our understanding of the vice principalship as a potential training ground for principal leaders. In theory, a vice principal’s experiences and education should prepare him or her for a principalship. In fact, with growing evidence of a nationwide shortage of highly qualified principals (Cantwell, 1993; Hargreaves, 2005; Shoho & Barnett, 2010) school
districts would be wise to develop leadership capacity in vice principals. Understanding how the role of vice principal aligns with the principalship may help guide the professional development of leaders at district and university levels. In addition, identifying the gaps in leadership knowledge and skills, as understood by current principals who formerly served as vice principals, would inform individual leaders, university preparation programs, and school districts as they seek to mediate those gaps. This study has potential to advance both theory and practice, helping school districts to leverage opportunities to groom qualified leaders as future principals. In addition, this study has potential to add to literature regarding how principal leadership practices are influenced and informed by previous vice principal experiences.

**Research Focus**

The study proposed to determine whether the duties assumed by vice principals serve as effectual “stepping-stones” to the principalship (Marshall et al., 1992, p. 80). Shoho and Barnett (2010) stated, “[Novice] principals are influenced by earlier personal, social, and professional experiences, which affect their job expectations and their perceived capabilities to succeed as principals” (p. 565). Building on recent research that confirms the relationship between the experiences of aspiring leaders and their readiness to become school principals (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cantwell, 1993; Glanz, 1994; Hart, 1991; Kwan, 2009a; Marshall, 1985; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987; Peters, 2011; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Shoho et al., 2012; Spady, 1985), the researcher sought to determine how the duties of those who had served previously as vice principals informed and influenced the current leadership practices of early-career and more seasoned principals serving at high-performing schools; the overarching goal was to
increase understanding of how the work experiences of vice principals can be better leveraged as apprenticeship opportunities for future principals. The researcher used a phenomenological approach to gather and analyze data from individual interviews with 12 principals. The principals were asked open-ended questions, which provided opportunities for them to describe job-related vice principal duties they found most transferable to the principal role.

**Findings of the Study**

A summary of the major research findings follows, organized according to the two primary research questions that guided the inquiry.

*Research question 1: How are the leadership practices of effective principals informed and influenced by their past experiences as vice principals?*

Study findings reveal leadership practices of both early-career and highly effective principals were influenced by their past experiences as vice principals via their (a) pathway to the principalship and through (b) the relationship they had with their lead principal.

**Pathway to the Principalship**

Marshall (1985) described the socialization process of vice principals as they move into leadership positions as one in which participants “separate from their reference group and form a positive orientation toward the values of the new group” (p. 30). Similarly, Browne-Ferrigno (2003) revealed that the professional growth process includes a “new mind set,” with role identity changing as one develops understanding of the roles and responsibilities of administration.
**Preadministrative positions.** Principal participants in the current study described the nature of their pathways to the principalship, in terms of both the trajectory of their career choices as well the school district structures and processes that helped direct those choices. The career paths of 11 of the 12 participants included what might be described as preadministrative positions. Those district level positions included peer/coach staff developer, science staff developer, school-level parent academic liaison, and school counselor. All such positions provided leadership experiences beyond those afforded to the participants in their previous roles as teachers. The preadministrative opportunities were catalysts as participants separated from former reference groups, thus lessening the “culture shock” Marshall and Greenfield (1987) described as vice principals separated themselves from the “functions of teaching and learning to focus on organizational stability” (p. 49). Participants were able to overcome the “demands and compromises in administration” (p. 39) and learned to become “part of the organizational culture, to fit in with the role of school administrator” (p. 33).

In addition, the preadministrative positions extended the organizational boundaries, making it possible for each participant to become acculturated to administration before truly becoming a member of the administrative group. The positions positively informed and influenced the career pathway of each participant as he or she moved toward administration and a vice principalship. In addition, those positions served as stepping-stones to the role of vice principal, just as the role of vice principal is considered a stepping-stone to the role of principal.

**Tapping and modified succession plans.** Given the current national pursuit for academic excellence, best practices for school leadership succession has become
increasingly important. Succession management systems have been developed to help organizations effectively identify and promote individuals who demonstrate the competencies to be successful leaders. Although scholars support district succession management systems (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Myung et al., 2011), the principals in this study did not participate in formal succession plans. Rather, the positive socialization they experienced in their preadministrative roles contributed to their desire for administrative positions. In addition, 6 of the 12 principals were “tapped” for leadership because they had demonstrated administrative ability and were encouraged by others to pursue administrative leadership roles. Some school districts use this informal leadership recruitment process in the absence of a formal succession management system. Myung et al. (2011) referred to this process as sponsored mobility. The six “tapped” participants were encouraged to pursue administrative positions by former principals, whereas the other six principals had keen desires for leadership and leveraged their own merits to advance into leadership roles by demonstrating contest mobility (Myung et al., 2011).

The Relationship Between Vice Principal and Lead Principal

In 1987, Gorton maintained that “the job of leading a school is too demanding for one person and, the one-person concept of leadership fails to recognize the significant contributions that an assistant principal can make” (p. 1). He believed that it was imperative to increase the leadership capacity for vice principals. Further, he stated, “If the vice principalship position is to improve, it will require enlightened and dedicated leadership by principals” (p. 1).
This study revealed that positive relationships between lead principals and their vice principals resulted in authentic opportunities for leadership and influenced the types of responsibilities and functions assumed by vice principals. The lead principal’s ability to build positive, collaborative working conditions influenced the degree to which responsibility was released. Provided opportunities for autonomous action as vice principals, those individuals rehearsed various leadership functions while under the guidance and support of lead principals. Retelle (2010) expressed the concept that vice principals are “political actors to their own careers” (p. 12) and noted that they “gained knowledge and leadership via daily work, principals, colleagues, and district workshops” (p. 5). For the principals who participated in the current study, job-embedded learning challenges created opportunities for them to take leadership risks in a relatively safe environment. In their former roles as vice principals, the principal participants in this study were asked to facilitate professional learning communities (PLCs), develop systems to incorporate new technology in the school setting, lead professional development using data to help teachers make data-driven decisions, and work with community members on long-term projects. Although much of their time as vice principals was consumed by discipline issues, especially at the middle and high school levels, the participants relished assuming responsibility for instruction-related tasks. By releasing responsibility to the vice principals, the lead principals became facilitators who guided them in preparing for the principalship through communication, positive working conditions, collaboration, and shared decision making. Lead principals delegated the workload; more importantly, they also allowed their vice principals to become leadership partners by providing
opportunities for them to make decisions while under their tutelage. Thus, leadership opportunities served as a pathway into the principalship.

Retelle (2010) noted that lead principals are principal makers who are well-connected within the district, encourage professional development training for vice principals, and mentor, train, and sponsor their vice principals. Positive leadership styles among lead principals presented opportunities that proved beneficial for the principals who participated in this study. Lead principals who clearly demonstrated collaboration, effective communication, modeling, and shared decision making facilitated leadership development. They released responsibility to their vice principals, guided from afar, and allowed them to struggle a bit. Seven of the 12 participants stated that their lead principals explicitly referred to them as co-leaders or leadership partners, and the other five principals described their lead principals as mentors. As mentors, lead principals provided leadership opportunities, encouraged discussion, and also provided specific feedback, which instilled confidence and the desire for additional leadership experiences.

Five of the participants experienced working with more than one lead principal while serving as vice principal, though some of those relationships were challenging. Of those five participants, four of them described the lead principal styles they encountered as less than perfect. Specifically, they reported that their lead principals conducted administrative meetings and did not build collaborative teams. Instead of releasing responsibility to their vice principals, they assigned specific work tasks. Participants indicated their strong preference for mentors with whom they formed positive relationships, which enabled them to move forward in their careers. That enthusiasm did not apply to lead principals who exhibited a do-as-I-say approach to mentoring and chose
to be less inclusive. The lead principals in this study played a substantial role in the leadership development of the vice principals.

*Research Question 2: How do school districts utilize the role of vice principal as a training opportunity for future principals as instructional leaders?*

Study findings revealed the work experiences of vice principals served as training for principals, both operationally and instructionally, specifically regarding (a) communicating beliefs and demonstrating competence, and (b) building networks to support their subsequent work as principals. Data also exposed (c) gaps in leadership training related to budget, instructional leadership, special education, and human resources.

**Communicating Beliefs and Demonstrating Competence**

All participants in the current study emphatically stated that everything they did as vice principals positively contributed to their current role (identity) as principals, including all operational and instructional efforts. Operational matters included the daily workings of a school, such as safety, discipline, and schedules. Instructional issues included professional development for teachers, classroom observations, and teacher evaluations, all matters that directly influenced student achievement. Sun (2012) detailed five top duties vice principals actually do while also noting the duties they believe they should do. Vice principals stated they *should* provide leadership regarding student discipline, instructional leadership, evaluation of teachers, administrative duties, and formulating goals. However, the vice principals in the study stated their work *actually* involved the following: student discipline, administrative duties (paperwork), counseling students, evaluating teachers, and conducting parent conferences. The duties presented
by Sun are in sync with duties detailed by principals in the current study. In addition to echoing the role descriptors, participants in the current study stated they learned to develop their leadership voices and polish communication skills across these roles as they fulfilled their operational and instructional responsibilities with various stakeholders.

Participants who served as vice principals at middle and/or high schools reported that they spent much of their time dealing with student discipline issues. However, they also stated that they learned district policy while handling those issues. (For example, a vice principal must be knowledgeable about district suspension or expulsion procedures and policies prior to suspending a student.) In addition, the participants developed the confidence to convey both positive and negative messages to stakeholders, learning to use all encounters as opportunities to communicate beliefs and goals. Although the participants may have sometimes functioned as administrators responsible for supervising disciplinary issues, they regarded those experiences as opportunities to improve communication skills. In addition, they strived to achieve a balance regarding operational and instructional duties by dedicating time to developing systems, programs, and long-term projects that had school-wide impact. This attitude confirms that vice principals possess a “respectable degree of proficiency and knowledge and are adaptable survivors who would devote more time to things they believe will make a difference in their schools” (Spady, 1985, p. 120).

As vice principals, the participants cultivated the advanced communication skills required to motivate and build commitment among stakeholders. They listened, asked questions, and demonstrated respect and acceptance of others while working to improve their schools. Each developed a strong sense of self. They learned to articulate their
beliefs and values in every conversation. Although the participants did not explicitly share the negative encounters they experienced as vice principals, they acknowledged the vice principalship was a training ground for a principalship. As vice principals, they understood that the ultimate leader of the school was the lead principal, and that they were learning to demonstrate the competencies required of principals.

**Building Networks to Support the Work**

As vice principals, the participants learned how to navigate the layers of departments and personnel within district offices to resolve problems and ensure progress in both operational and instructional matters. Participants related experiences, involving operations and instruction that enabled them to develop networks of support to maximize their understanding of specific tasks. For example, principals reported that they established key personnel contacts as vice principals that serve them currently as principals. Those connections were forged within specific district-level departments, such as key facilities maintenance and operations personnel, to support the operations of a school.

In addition, the relationships and contacts the participants developed as vice principals are invaluable to them now as principals. Thus, while acting as co-principals the vice principals began to eliminate potential hurdles as they learned to become part of the organizational culture of school administrators (Marshall, 1985). As vice principals, they also learned how to interact with the right people and create appropriate attitudes to ensure that others would see them as competent and trusted members of the administrative group (Marshall, 1985). Their daily encounters as vice principals helped the participants to center their work on shared values, which involved clearly
communicating their own thoughts while also demonstrating sensitivity to the perspectives of others. In addition, participants were building stakeholders’ confidence in their competence as leaders.

**Gaps in Leadership Training**

All the participants in this study believed their work as vice principals provided invaluable leadership training for the role and responsibilities they subsequently assumed as principals. However, many also believed there were gaps in their leadership experiences. As the principals reflected on their professional development, they indicated a desire for more training in four key areas: budget, instructional leadership, special education, and human resources.

**Budget.** Responses of the participants in this study mirrored those of respondents in leadership studies conducted by Kwan (2009b) and Kwan and Walker (2012) that linked to training gaps in resource management, specifically regarding school budgets. Participants in the current study believed additional training in budgetary issues would have better prepared them for their responsibilities as principals. Although several of the principals stated that their lead principal did discuss the school budget, they also indicated they lacked specific budget training conducted at district and site levels. Principals discussed the immense responsibility of spending site money wisely for the greater good of students and the school itself. They also indicated they needed direct instruction regarding the budget when they assumed their principalships. During these pressing financial times, principals recognized the importance of having a firm understanding of school budgets so that they can best meet their students’ needs.
Instructional leadership. Principals who had served as vice principals at middle schools noted gaps in training for instructional leadership. They stated that operational issues, especially discipline, often dominated their time. Participants indicated that handling discipline incidents at the middle school level could involve hours of work to investigate thoroughly, communicate with stakeholders, and appropriately document. Although being in classrooms and collaborating with teachers was a district priority for vice principals, the participants felt bogged down by discipline matters. While serving as vice principals of middle schools, participants were unable to develop strong instructional leadership knowledge. In contrast, the participant who served as a vice principal at a large high school did not express a lack of training opportunities for instructional leadership. However, he shared the vice principalship with two other vice principals, three counselors, and an operations manager. The additional administrative support for students may have afforded him time to support teachers with instruction.

The responses about responsibilities from participants who were former middle school vice principals aligned with responsibilities traditionally assigned to vice principals (Glanz, 1994; Marshall, 1985; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Tredway et al., 2007). Because of the pervasive discipline issues at middle schools, the focus often shifted from instructional to discipline or operational tasks. Although the participants in the current study considered disciplinary encounters as opportunities to sharpen communication skills, they felt compelled to become more informed on instruction.

The former middle school vice principals who went on to serve as principals at elementary schools indicated the largest learning gap concerned instructional leadership. They experienced fewer disciplinary issues at elementary sites and were heavily involved
in the instructional leadership at their schools. Participants credited networking with principal colleagues as a plus in terms of ramping up their instructional expertise. Participants who were former elementary vice principals moved seamlessly into principal positions because they were confident in their knowledge of instruction and were provided ample opportunities as vice principals to apply that knowledge.

**Special education and human resources.** Several of the principals shared that they would have benefitted from more experience in the areas of special education and human resources. The participants referred to special education as encompassing both instructional and operational components in the school setting. They desired more knowledge and a better understanding of special education terminology, procedures, and laws. To perform confidently as the administrator overseeing the special education department, participants believed they needed professional development designed specifically for administrators. In addition, they also desired more leadership training in the area of human resources. As vice principals, the participants had served on hiring committees, but they did not have a clear understanding of hiring practices in the context of union and district regulations. Unless school districts formalize the process of how lead principals support the position of the vice principal, that support may never occur. Therefore, it would behoove school districts to rewrite the job description and evaluation criteria for principals to include mentoring vice principals and/or building capacity for teacher leaders. Such change would ensure that principals intentionally seek to build leadership capacity.
Implications for Practice

Although there seems to be an increase in research focused on the role of vice principals, there is little research regarding the link between the roles and responsibilities of vice principals as they apply to the principalship. Research has demonstrated that vice principals play a significant role and make a substantial difference in the operation of the schools they serve. In theory, a vice principal’s experiences and education should prepare him or her for a principalship. Therefore, district and university leaders would be wise to develop leadership capacity among vice principals. Principal participants in this study were exemplars who demonstrated how vice principal duties informed and influenced the leadership practices of current principals. The researcher organized findings according to themes that emerged in the data analysis, including (a) pathway to the principalship, (b) relationship between vice principal and lead principal, (c) vice principal responsibilities as training for principal responsibilities, both operational and instructional, and (d) gaps in leadership training. Through the analysis of data, the researcher gained insight into how previous vice principal duties informed and influenced the leadership practices of current principals.

To support the development of future leaders as part of succession planning, school districts might benefit from revising their aspiring leadership programs within the context of district professional development plans. Doing so might entail the district creating systematic leadership training for vice principals to better prepare the future leaders to become principals, thus creating a pipeline of leaders who are well prepared to serve. In addition, there are indicators that a district might also benefit from creating
preaministrative positions for teacher leaders; relying solely on “tapping” as a succession management system is ill-advised.

Understanding how the role of vice principal aligns with the principalship may help guide leadership professional development at district and university levels. Providing leadership development for vice principals to fill the gaps indicated by participants in this study would further support vice principals as they seek principalships. In addition, identifying the gaps in leadership knowledge and skills from the perspective of current principals, formerly vice principals, would serve university preparation programs and school districts as they seek to mediate these gaps. In addition, in order to strengthen the leadership expertise and understanding of district policy, districts would be wise create formal or informal networking systems for vice principals. This study has the potential to advance both theory and practice, helping ensure that qualified leaders step into principalships and adding to the literature on how principal leadership practices are influenced and informed by the experiences of previous vice principals. Consequently, this study will provide scholars and school districts with insight related to preparation and professional development possibilities that are necessary to expand the leadership practices of vice principals.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Researchers have studied the role conception of vice principals and their initial socialization into new communities of practice as principals (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cantwell, 1993; Fauske & Ogawa, 1987; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Marshall, 1985; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987; Reed & Himmler, 1985). Findings indicate the role of the vice principal serves to inform a principalship. In addition, a growing body of research
examines district practices that relate to principal succession (Hargreaves, 2005; Hart, 1991; Meyer et al., 2011; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985; Peters, 2011; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Shoho et al., 2012). Thoughtful succession plans support and increase principal efficacy, and they also build capacity within the district’s organization. Finally, research regarding district efforts to expand and support the instructional leadership capacity of vice principals (Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2004; Marshall & Greenfield, 1987; Myung et al., 2011; Quong, 2006; Spady, 1985) informed this study, with data that revealed a continuing deficit in the instructional leadership development for vice principals.

This study sought to increase understanding of how the work experiences of vice principals can be better leveraged as apprenticeship opportunities for future principals. Additionally, this study strived to determine the influential links between the role of vice principal and that of principal for those who currently serve in the latter capacity. Future studies might explore the degree to which universities provide targeted instructional leadership development for aspiring administrators to better prepare new leaders in special education, for example. Researchers might also explore the influence of authentic instructional leadership-focused field experiences on future leaders’ practice, especially at the middle and high school levels (Perez, Uline, Johnson, Ward, & Basom, 2011). Future studies might compare district succession management plans to discover how school districts develop future leaders. Further, future research might also explore how having specific preadministrative positions, such as those assumed by participants in this study, might become a deliberate step along the pathway to the principalship. Additionally, researchers might assess how the relationship between a highly effective principal and his
or her vice principal impacts the latter’s career path. For example, does the likelihood of advancing from vice principal to principal increase or decrease under the mentorship of a highly effective principal?

**Limitations**

While this study advances understanding of how the work experiences of vice principals can be better leveraged as apprenticeship opportunities for future principals, limitations of the study must be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a single district setting, which limited the extent to which its findings can be generalized to the broader population of school districts. However, the qualitative data provide a starting point for a deeper understanding of how the role of the vice principal serves as a stepping-stone to a principalship. Furthermore, the study’s results are restricted to the experiences and perceptions of those persons questioned and interviewed at the school level. In addition, 5 of the 12 participants were early-career principals with less than 1 year of experience in that role. Although as early-career principals those leaders had more immediate recall of their experiences as vice principals, they were less experienced. Results were restricted to assessing the experiences and perceptions of the principals interviewed. Although the researcher worked to develop an interview tool that encouraged principals to provide thoughtful answers that highlighted their experiences, the findings for this study are based on the perceptions of the participants. In terms of limitations, it is also important to note that only 12 principals were interviewed during the designated study, and only one participant was a high school principal. Future research could include equal representation from principals across all school levels. Also, it is important to note that the researcher was serving as a vice principal of a middle school at
the onset of the study and became an elementary principal during the course of the study. Therefore, findings may inadvertently be biased. To mediate possible bias, the researcher created graphic organizers with detailed transcriptions of the recorded interviews, which served to further flesh out the interviewees.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided a summary and interpretation of key findings, as well as a discussion of implications for practice and for future research. Study limitations were acknowledged and suggestions for additional research were detailed. Final thoughts on the overall research follow.

By conducting this study, the researcher gained a better understanding of how the work experiences of a vice principal can be better leveraged as an apprenticeship opportunity for future principals. Additionally, it became apparent that an individual’s experiences as a vice principal informs and influences his or her role as a principal. Evidence collected from participants clarified that the role of the vice principal provides a pathway to the principalship and serves as a pipeline to advanced leadership positions. Predominant themes that emerged from the data included (a) pathway to the principalship, (b) relationship between the vice principal and his or her lead principal, (c) vice principal responsibilities as training for principal responsibilities, operational and instructional, and (d) gaps in leadership training. Understanding how the administrative positions positively impacted the participants can be beneficial for school districts. Using these findings, school districts may be better positioned to create preadministrative opportunities for aspiring leaders who are not yet ready to become vice principals, thus creating additional pathways to leadership. Furthermore, principals could receive
additional training to learn how to become “principal makers.” Now more than ever, school leaders are challenged to establish rigorous learning cultures for the teachers and students at their schools. University and school district leaders share responsibility in designing and nurturing leadership programs for future school leaders that will enable them to guide their schools with commitment, knowledge, and courage.

This researcher hopes that the findings from this study will provide university and district leaders with the insight and impetus to design high-quality leadership development programs for aspiring leaders, which would support school sites in their quest to improve student achievement for all.
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doi:10.1177/004208598702200103


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APPENDIX A

Individual Interview Protocol: Principals

A. Number of Individual Interviews: 10-15

B. Timeline of Individual Interview: August 2013 - November 2013

C. Introduction Script:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This research project seeks to determine how previous vice principal duties inform and influence the current leadership practices of highly effective principals. The purpose of this study is to increase understanding of how vice principal work experiences can be better leveraged as apprentice opportunities for future principals. The results will be used to inform educational leaders and policy makers regarding the professional development of aspiring leaders.

You will be asked a series of questions over the next hour to ascertain your experiences, perceptions and feelings about your previous work as a vice principal as it relates to your current work as a principal. Although the session will not cover anything sensate or invasive, what is said during this interview will be keep in confidence.

However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, so please keep this in mind as you answer the questions. So that I can correctly gather information from this session, I will be taking notes and audio-taping the session. If anytime you wish to have the tape recording stopped, simply say so. The recording will be stopped for the time that you need to complete your comment. You may always pass if you do not wish to speak. Please feel free to ask any questions or make comments at any time during the interview.
D. Hand out Consent Forms. Remind participant that participation in the research project is voluntary and that he/she may withdraw from the study at any time.

E. (Continue Script)

The research goal of this individual interview is to gain insight into your experiences about your previous work as a vice principal as it relates to your current work as a principal.

1. When did you decide that you wanted to become an administrator?

2. How long were you a vice principal?

3. Describe specific vice principal responsibilities that contributed to your understanding of the responsibilities and duties as a principal.

4. Describe vice principal responsibilities that did not contribute to your understanding of the responsibilities and duties as a principal.

5. Are there experiences you wished you had as a vice principal? If so, list them and describe how these experiences might have better prepared you for your current role as principal.

6. Describe how your former principal facilitated your development as a leader.

7. Describe three specific problems of practice you successfully addressed as a vice principal. How does the knowledge gained through these experiences inform your current work as a principal?

8. How long have you been a principal at this site?

9. Describe your typical day as a principal. How does that differ from your typical day as a vice principal?

10. Describe a major difference between being a vice principal and being a principal.
F. Wrap Up Following Questions

Hand back copies of signed consent forms.

Thank you for your participation! Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions (hand out business card).
APPENDIX B

Email Script

The following is the script for an email to potential participants:

Margaret Joseph of San Diego State University is conducting a research study regarding how previous vice principal duties inform and influence the current leadership practices of highly effective principals. She is attempting to learn about how your experiences as a former vice principal serve you in your current role as a principal.

If you would like to participate, please let me know. You are not required to participate in this study, I will ask you to engage in one interview and one focus group interview. The interview will take a half-hour to one hour. The focus group interview will take approximately one hour. Participation in this study will be confidential. There is no incentive or pay for participating, but you will probably enjoy talking with the researcher, and you will be able to assist her in communicating to school districts and universities potential professional development needs for vice principals who aspire to become principals.

(If the researcher is an acquaintance of the potential participant, I will also include the following: Please know that although we are acquaintances, your participation or lack of participation will not affect our personal relationship.)

Margaret Joseph

margaretrosejoseph@yahoo.com

phone (619-913-3008)
Appendix C

Phone Script

The following is the script for a phone call to potential participants:

Hello, this is Margaret Joseph. I am a graduate student at San Diego State University, and I am conducting a study regarding how previous vice principal duties inform and influence the current leadership practices of highly effective principals. I am attempting to learn about how your experiences as a former vice principal serve you in your current role as a principal.

If you would like to participate, please let me know. You are not required to participate in this study, I will ask you to engage in one interview. The interview will take a half-hour to one hour. You will participate anonymously, meaning that your name will not appear on interviews. There is no incentive or pay for participating, but you will probably enjoy talking with me, and you will be able to assist me in communicating to school districts and universities potential professional development needs for vice principals who aspire to become principals.

(If the researcher is an acquaintance of the potential participant, I will also include the following: Please know that although we are acquaintances, your participation or lack of participation will not affect our personal relationship.)

Margaret Joseph: margaretrosejoseph@yahoo.com
phone (619-913-3008)
Hello,

You are being invited to participate in a study of vice principals. The purpose of this study seeks to determine how previous vice principal duties inform and influence the current leadership practices of highly effective principals, with an aim to increase understanding of how vice principal work experiences can be better leveraged as apprentice opportunities for future principals. This study will help to further understanding of what skills and practices vice principals need to adopt in order to advance into principalships and eventually become highly effective principals.

During the past decade, the role of the vice principal has expanded to include instructional leadership responsibilities. Although educational reforms, focused on improving instruction, have been responsible for a shift from operational to instructional responsibilities, much of the vice principal’s day is consumed with operational duties.

The researcher, Margaret Joseph, is a doctoral student working under the advisement of Dr. Cynthia Uline in the College of Education at San Diego State University. The findings of the research will be used to create a phenomenological study that other researchers can use for further investigation and that educational leaders and policy makers can use to advance research in how the role of the vice principal serves future leadership opportunities. The research includes one-on-one and focus group interviews.

You will be asked to contribute to this study by participating in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, and a focus group interview, lasting approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary and there is no penalty if you choose not to participate or choose to discontinue participation. The research involves minimal risk to the participants (less than or equal to that encountered in daily life at school). Participants may feel uncomfortable talking about his/her feelings about the school environment or may become tired or frustrated when trying to complete the assigned tasks. If that should occur, you may discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

The researcher does not foresee any other discomforts or risks associated with this data collection. There are no experimental variables and there is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Are there any benefits to yourself or others?** Participants will have contributed to a study that could be of benefit to educational leaders and policy-makers.
Your privacy will be protected. Your name will be coded to match data collected. All names in the dissertation or other works published from the dissertation findings by the researchers will be pseudonyms. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. Quotes from the observations and interviews may be used for publication of findings, but no participant will be identified by name. Your participation will remain confidential (this means that I will conceal your identity and only codes will be used on interview forms and notes I take) except as required by law. The researcher does not believe there are any conflicts of interest, and the participant does not waive any legal right by participating in this study.

If you change your mind about participating. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

You may contact the researchers with questions by email (margaretrosejoseph@yahoo.com or phone (619-913-3008). It is suggested that you keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may also contact the Division of Research Administration at San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form, as signified by the Board’s stamps. The consent form must be reviewed annually and expires on the date indicated on the stamps.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Your signature also indicates that you consent to the use of audiotapes and understand how the tapes will be used for this study. You have been given a copy of this consent form. You have also been given a copy of “The Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” You have been told that by signing this consent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)__________________________________________

_____________________________________ ___________________________
Signature of Participant Date
APPENDIX E

Faculty Sponsor’s Assurance

Student initiated research involving human subjects, whether dissertation, thesis, or other research projects, must be supervised by an SDSU faculty member to insure the compliance with procedures and regulations relating to the protection of human subjects.

The signature of the faculty sponsor is required on all research where the student is identified as the principal investigator. The faculty sponsor’s signature verifies that the research has been reviewed by the department and is in compliance with federal and SDSU policies.

Name of Investigator: Margaret Joseph
Department: Educational Leadership
Project Title: VICE PRINCIPALS: PRESCRIPTION FOR THE PRINCIPALSHIP

The faculty sponsor is responsible to:
1—Meet with the investigator to monitor study progress.
2—Be available to the investigator to supervise and to address problems should they arise.
3—Oversee the prompt reporting of any significant or untoward adverse effects within 5 days of occurrence.
4—Arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume these duties when unavailable (vacation or sabbatical).
5—Monitor the research activity to insure that the protocol approved by SDSU IRB is followed.

The faculty sponsor has reviewed the protocol for the following:
1—Research design is sound and appropriate to the discipline.
2—Subject selection is fair and subjects are informed as to how they were selected.
3—Recruitment procedures help ensure voluntary inclusion.
4—Informed consent language is appropriate to subjects.
5—Privacy and confidentiality are protected.
6—Potential benefits are described.
7—Potential risks (psychological, social, physical, economic, legal) are identified and managed.
8—Benefits outweigh the risks.
9—Informed consent document is attached to the submitted protocol (parental permission and assent when applicable).
10—Participating agencies/institutions’ letters of approval are attached to the submitted protocol.

Your signature below verifies your understanding of the responsibilities and review requirements noted. Your signature also certifies that the student investigator is familiar
with the ethical practices, regulations and policies that pertain to human subjects research and has sufficient training to conduct this study as described in the submitted protocol.

7-1-13

Signature of SDSU Faculty Sponsor

The signature of a faculty member who has been designated by the department as responsible for preliminary human subjects review is required. If the department does not have an assigned person for this task, a faculty sponsor may sign this form.

7-1-13

Signature of Faculty Member Approving for the Department

Forms may be mailed or faxed to the IRB or may be scanned and uploaded to the protocol.
IRB Administrative Office
Graduate & Research Affairs
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