

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON HOW THE PRINCIPAL'S INSTRUCTIONAL  
LEADERSHIP AFFECTS CHANGE DIRECTED AT STUDENT IMPROVEMENT

by

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(Under the Direction of C. Thomas Holmes)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perspectives on how the principal's instructional leadership affects change directed at student improvement. The theoretical perspective informing the study is symbolic interactionism, and the methodology was grounded theory. Face to face interviews were the primary data source. Constant comparative analysis was used to analyze the data and to generate theory grounded in the data.

The purpose of schools is student improvement, and the implementation of change through instructional leadership has been paramount to this goal. The principal had accepted the leadership role as instructional leader of a school, which the principals' leadership practices have or can make a difference in the effectiveness of the school regarding change for student improvement. The data from this study indicate that the experiences of the teachers in their instructional leadership programs in the rural north Georgia County facilitated a stressful change and implementation of standards. Interactions with leadership led to supportive interactions, which provided the means for positive outcomes and the strength to overcome the challenges identified by the teachers. However teachers did report frustration over staff development and whether it had a clearly defined purpose for the enhancement of student improvement. Teachers

also reported frustration that when students show improvement the administration is praised but when the students do not show improvement the teachers are blamed. Therefore little credit is afforded to teachers for student improvement.

INDEX WORDS: Student Improvement, Instructional Leader, Change, Teachers, Perspective

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## DEDICATION

Mom, Dad and family, thank you for your support. Mom sorry you could not be here for the end of this journey. Dad you always knew I would complete this journey.

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When I began this doctoral journey I would never have guessed it would take this long to complete. Never would I have imagined that so many of my family members would not be here to see me finish this professional and educational goal complete. I did not travel alone.

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## CHAPTER 1

### *INTRODUCTION*

This study examined teachers' perspectives on how the principal's instructional leadership affects change directed at student improvement. The first section of this introduction gives an overview of the literature related to principal leadership, effective schools, and the implementation of change. The second section provides a statement of the problem. The third section describes the purpose of the study; presents research questions, assumptions, and definitions of terms; and outlines site and sample selection criteria. The fourth section discusses research and design methodology. The fifth section introduces the significance of the study, and the last section suggests the limitations of the study.

#### Overview of the Literature

##### *Principal Leadership*

Leadership is considered to be vital to the successful functioning of many aspects of a school (Marzano, Waters, McNulty. 2005). A principal as leader of a school is considered to be the most influential and important person within the school. They set the tone for the school, morale, professionalism and climate for teaching. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) assembled a list of aspects linked to effective school leadership to illustrate the importance (Marzano et al., 2005). While not all-inclusive, this list further emphasizes the importance of leadership in schools.

- The overall climate of the school and the climate in individual classrooms (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Brookover et al., 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Griffith, 2000; Villani, 1996)
- The presence and clarity of a mission and goals in the school (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Duke, 1982)
- The attitudes of teachers (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Oakes, 1989; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979)
- The classroom practices of teachers (Brookover et al., 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; McDill, Rigsby, & Meyers, 1969; Miller & Sayre, 1986)
- The organization of curriculum and instruction (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Cohen & Miller, 1980; Eberts & Stone, 1988; Glasman & Binianimov, 1981; Oakes, 1989)
- Students' opportunity to learn (Duke & Canady, 1991; Dwyer, 1986; Murphy & Hallinger, 1989)

Listed above are studies that are indicators that the principal is asserted to be highly significant in building relationships that foster the academic achievement of students. The ASCD states that the importance of effective school leadership "is thought to be a necessary precondition for an effective school" (p 5). Donmoyer (1985) explains that the principal invariably is a significant factor in a school's success based on studies available at the time. A review of those studies will follow in chapter 2.

The purpose of this study was to examine effective principals' instructional leadership ability to affect change from teachers' perspectives. Therefore, only those aspects of leadership will be discussed and defined in this study. Behaviors identified in early research include

commitment to a vision and mission (Firestone & Wilson, 1989; Krug, 1992; Persell & Cookson, 1982; Rutherford, 1985; Smith & Andrews, 1989), communication of that vision and mission (Krug, 1992; Smith & Andrews, 1989), high expectations (Krug, 1993; Persell & Cookson, 1982), and monitoring student progress (Krug, 1993; Persell & Cookson, 1982; Rutherford, 1985). Sheppard (1996) synthesized findings on instructional leadership and reports a positive relationship between effective instructional leadership of principals and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and creativity. He also noted that the most effective instructional leadership behavior of principals at the elementary and high school levels is promoting the professional development of teachers. Evidence of the promotion of professional development at the middle school level, however, is noticeably missing from these studies; the present study will help fill this gap in the research. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) researched studies regarding the importance of leadership covering the last 35 years. In that research the ASCD found more than 5000 articles and studies related to school leadership but only 69 that actually examined the relationship of leadership to student academic achievement (2005).

### *Effective Schools*

A 1996 review of empirical literature by Hallinger and Heck (1996) on the relationship between the role of the principal and school effectiveness revealed, “principal leadership can make a difference in student learning” (p. 37). Furthermore, “principal leadership that makes a difference is aimed toward influencing internal school processes that are directly linked to student learning” (p. 38). Hallinger and Heck’s empirical study of research in “Exploring the Principal’s Contribution to School Effectiveness: 1980-1995” verified that, “achieving results through others is the essence of leadership” (p. 39).

Blase and Blase (1998), who have written extensively about principal instructional leadership, reached a similar conclusion: “Although there exists an emerging knowledge base about the behaviors and potential of instructional leadership, the extant literature provides few clues on how principals and teachers together can achieve shared vision and commitment—a foundation necessary for school improvement” (p. 12). While their research provided additional clues, they concluded, “we have not yet achieved a full understanding of the myriad related issues” (p. 167). Accordingly, the proposed study will seek to add to the understanding of some of the issues related to principal instructional leadership and its impact on classroom instruction. Studying the perceptions of teachers about the effectiveness of principal leadership is thought to provide the most valid information related to change. Teachers have the closest relationship to the day-to-day operations of a school and how the principal effects those operations (Ebmeier, 1991; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990).

### *Change*

Change within a school takes many forms and varieties that include all minutia of a school from the color of the walls to change in instructional practices. This study will review change in three parts each related to the integral parts of change needed to improve student achievement based on teachers’ perception of the principal leadership of a school. The three parts identified by the researcher are Change: The effective principal instructional leadership, change related to improvement, and change for student improvement. To clarify the type of changes being research each will be discussed below.

### *Change: The Effective Principal Instructional Leadership*

The characteristics of effective leadership in schools have been a topic of many studies, as documented by educational research findings on successful leadership behaviors and

characteristics (Blase & Blase, 1998; Blase & Blase, 2001; Blase, J., Blase, J., Anderson, G. L., & Dungan, S., 1995; Blase & Kirby, 1992). The need to emphasize leadership over management in order to affect change has not gone unnoticed (Schlechty, 2001), but despite this recognition, change has been decelerated by the more traditional mechanisms placed in schools. Heck and Hallinger (1999) claimed, “variants of structural-functionalism continue to maintain a strong grip on the field of educational administration” (p. 145). The evolutions from manager to leader, and changes facilitated thereby, have been found in corporate structures, and these features have also been reported in educational research.

Hallinger and Heck (1998) reviewed 40 studies in their research on the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement; they reported that leadership has an impact on teachers’ perspectives of school conditions, their commitment to change, and the organizational learning that takes place. With respect to outcomes, leadership had an influence on teachers’ perspectives of progress with implementing reform initiative and teachers’ perspectives of increases in student outcome. (p. 176).

#### *Change: Related to Improvement*

This section is to review how teachers implement or if they implement changes purposed by the principal instructional leadership within their classrooms. The perspective of teachers on the effectiveness principal instructional leadership has a role in whether teachers implement these changes (Cotton, 2003). Blase and Blase (1999) also found that effective principals are ones who visit classrooms regularly to witness classroom changes implemented by the teacher. In studies conducted and reviewed by Cotton (2003) and researched by Firestone and Wilson (1985) also support the idea that teachers contribute the most when they are given support of their principal to implement practices deemed best for student achievement.

#### *Change: School Change for Student Improvement*

This section is designed to make a connection between effective schools and effective principal instructional leadership as related to changes to improve student achievement. Delapp

(1988) studied how the role of the principal has changed from one of a manager to a leader of a school, more specifically the instructional leader of a school. The proper instructional leadership practices have been linked to effective schools through research done by Isom (1986), Sergiovanni (1997) and others. Furthermore Isom's study reported that principal effectiveness often resides in the perspectives of those who work directly within the organization. Therefore completing the link between effective schools, effective instructional leadership, teachers' perceptions and student achievement. This will be covered in more detail in the literature review.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of schools is to improve student achievement, and the implementation of change through instructional leadership has been paramount to this goal. Teachers are autonomous in their classrooms; once the students arrive and the classroom door is closed, the teacher is the sole proprietor of the instructional process. Consequently, the principal's instructional leadership only has an effect if the teacher chooses to use the suggested changes in their classroom. Furthermore, principals can only verify that these changes have been implemented by visiting the classroom periodically. Despite research acknowledging the need and effectiveness of classroom visitation, principals rarely devote enough of their time to classroom visits to witness changes first hand (Blase & Blase, 2001).

How then is the effect of instructional principal leadership on teachers measured? Teachers are provided with staff development aimed at improving instruction and implementing those changes in the classroom. However, despite the best efforts of principals and staff development, teachers are often left alone to decide what will be implemented. Teachers who perceive their principals as knowledgeable leaders may implement changes more consistently and more carefully than others who do not hold this perspective (Blase & Blase, 1999). Little



empirical research has been done to explore the connection between teacher perspectives on the principals who suggest changes and the implementation of those changes in the classroom.

Research indicates, “an important blank spot concerns in-depth descriptions of how principals and other school leaders create and sustain the in-school factors that foster successful schooling” (Heck & Hallinger, 1999, p. 141).

The social relationships that exist in schools and what teachers learn from these social relations affect the way teachers view instructional leadership. Sergiovanni (1997) stated, “Perspectives on how to bring about change in school are a function of the way change agents understand the nature of schools as organized entities and a function of the way change agents understand human nature itself” (p. 577). The principal as leader of instruction is the change agent of focus in this study, which present how teachers’ perspective on principal instructional leadership influences the implementation of change in the classroom.

## Description of the Study

### *Purpose of the Study and Research Questions*

The purpose of this study is to describe teachers’ perspectives of the principal as a leader of change directed at student achievement. Assumptions by the researcher are that the principal has accepted the leadership role as instructional leader of a school, which the principals’ leadership practices have or can make a difference in the effectiveness of the school regarding change for student improvement. The guiding questions include the following:

1. Has the principal made effort to implement change in instruction?
2. What processes did the principal use to define *change* as it relates to classroom instruction?

3. Did teachers implement the changes requested by the principal instructional leadership, why or why not?
4. Were teachers involved in defining what changes were needed and the goal of those changes?
5. Have the changes increased the school effectiveness in student improvement?

The selection of the middle school teaching environment is to advance research in this area, as previous noted most of the studies to date have related their research to elementary and high schools.

### Research Design and Methodology

The site for this research study was chosen based on the standards of purposeful sampling. As described by Bogdan and Bilken (1998), purposeful sampling is a sampling process that includes participants because “they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (p. 65). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the purpose of sampling is to allow the researcher to maximize information collection from information-rich data sources about the study topic. Therefore, the site selected for the study will provide data sources that are information-rich. The criteria for the final site selection were as follows:

1. The school system and administration are willing to cooperate with the researcher and accept the methodology described in chapter 3.
2. The instructional leader of the middle school has sought to implemented change directed at student improvement.
3. The middle school is considered an “improving” school according to criteria established by the State of Georgia in the most recent Report Card rating system.

4. The instructional leader of the middle school has sought to promote professional development of teachers.

### Sample Selection

The sample was chosen based on (a) the willingness of the administration and teachers to participate in this study and (b) the extent to which the school is continually making gains in student achievement. Quantitative data such as standardized test scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) provided by the Georgia State Department School Report Card will be used to determine the latter. Theoretical sampling, an essential component of grounded theory methodology, where the total sample is not specified before the data collection, will be used to select participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) “Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop this theory as it emerges” (p. 45). It is anticipated that the principal, additional administrative personnel, and as many as eight teachers, two from each grade level with two from physical education and connection classes, will be selected to participate in this study.

### Research Methods

The theoretical perspective informing the study is symbolic interactionism, defined by Blumer (1969) as “activity in which humans interpret each other’s gestures and act on the basis of meaning yielded by interpretation” (pp. 65-66). Grounded theory methodology, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), will guide the research process through data collection, data coding, and data analysis. Data collection procedures will include interviews and document

collection. Additionally, a researcher journal will be maintained to record researcher notes, memos, and reflections.

### Interviews

Following procedures consistent with symbolic interactionism and grounded theory methodology, interviews will be used to elicit teacher perspectives on the principal as a leader of change. Data will be coded, analyzed, and classified into emerging categories as it is collected. Findings will be shared with participants to ensure the accuracy of the data.

### Documents

Personal and official documents will be used as sources of data. According to Bogdan and Bilken (1998), personal documents, such as personal notes and calendars, and official documents, including meeting agendas and minutes, school handbooks, mission statements, newsletters, and other school- or district-produced documents, may be collected and analyzed. All collected data will be returned or destroyed upon completion of this study. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participant identities.

### Researcher Journal

Field notes, memos, and reflections of the researcher will be kept in a journal. Data and memos recorded in the journal will also be coded and analyzed.

### Significance of the Study

Instructional leadership has been a key component of a principal's responsibilities for many years. However, very little has been written about teacher perspectives on the instructional leadership role and its effect on changes in classroom instruction. By investigating teachers' perspectives on the efforts of principals to implement change directed at student achievement and how those perspectives affect teachers' classroom instruction, this study will add to the

knowledge base of research on school effectiveness. Principal instructional leadership practices can be improved by understanding the teachers' perspectives of change implementation.

#### Limitations of the Study

Representation is one of the limitations of this study. Specifically, the site chosen will not be representative of all middle schools in the state or the country. As a result, the qualitative results of this study will not offer generalizations to all principals, teachers and school improvement efforts. The number of willing teachers involved and their honesty limit the group of teachers and their perspectives during the interview. The teacher sample may or may not represent the entire group of teachers and their perspectives.

#### Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 provides an overview of related literature. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology that will be used during the course of this study. Chapter 4 is about the data collected. Chapter 5 will present the results of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### *OVERVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE*

The purpose of this review is to describe and critique literature related to teachers' perspectives on the principal as a leader of change directed at improving student achievement. Related literature includes research on effective schools, instructional leadership, perspectives on principal and teacher roles, and the effect of instructional leadership on change.

Leadership in schools is as diverse as the number schools and principals within those schools each having their own personalities and needs based on their populations (Lapman & Hoeh, 1974). Defined by Lapman and Hoeh, *leadership* is not simply a matter of group control, but the initiation of a new structure or procedure for accomplishing an organization's goals and objectives. One aspect of leadership that is directly related to the present study is the initiation of change to meet school goals and objectives (Marzano, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1997).

#### Principal Leadership

The purpose of this study is the effective principals' instructional leaderships' ability to affect change from the teachers' perspectives, therefore only those aspects of leadership will be discussed and defined in this study. Effective principal leadership behaviors identified in early research include commitment to a vision and mission (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Krug, 1992; Persell & Cookson, 1982; Rutherford, 1985; Smith & Andrews, 1989), communication of that vision and mission (Krug, 1992; Smith & Andrews, 1989), high expectations (Krug, 1993; Persell & Cookson, 1982), and monitoring student progress (Krug, 1993; Persell & Cookson, 1982; Rutherford, 1985). Sheppard (1996) synthesized findings on instructional leadership and

reported a positive relationship between effective instructional leadership of principals and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and creativity. He also noted that the most effective instructional leadership behavior of principals at the elementary and high school levels is promoting the professional development of teachers. Evidence of the promotion of professional development at the middle school level, however, is noticeably missing from these studies; the present study will help fill this gap in the research.

### Effective Schools

The effective schools movement was the first reform movement to respond after earlier attempts stalled after the findings of the Coleman report were published, making its appearance on the stage of educational reform to prove school effectiveness and, thereby, to disprove the findings of Coleman et al. (1966) and Jencks et al. (1972). Effective schools research was different from earlier research; it sought out and examined the educational practices in superior schools to identify “knowledge and skills needed to articulate an instructional vision, secure widespread engagement in that vision, and promote successful fulfillment” (Lemahieu, Roy, & Foss, 1997, p. 582). This movement was to address the findings of *The Coleman Report* (1966) that was one of the earliest studies to address the schools’ affect on student achievement. The government-sponsored study related to the equality of education reported that schools have little influence on a child’s achievement and that their home environment, neighborhood and peer interactions had to bear most of affect related to achievements.

The second wave of the effective schools movement was to emphasize the importance of school based reform based on the concept of instructional leadership. This was based on studies that indicated that teachers could enhance school improvement through their involvement in decisions. Although the principal remained the most influential person within a school a

paradigm shift was beginning to take place where the principal was not just an administrator but also an integral part of instructional leadership for change in student achievement.

Edmonds (1979) and Brookover and Lezotte (1979), through their studies of effective inner city schools, inspired the reform movement that came to be known as the “effective schools movement.” Their research, which identified positive characteristics allegedly associated with student achievement in schools found to be effective, indicated that the principal’s strong instructional leadership was essential to school effectiveness. Among Edmonds’ findings were other instructional dimensions credited to the principal and linked to effectiveness: high expectations, an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, an emphasis on acquisition of basic skills, and methods for frequent monitoring of student and teacher progress.

Effective schools research provided hope that schools across the nation could, by following prescriptive remedies, become effective (Hallinger, Murphy, Weil, Mesa, & Mitman, 1983). The reform initiatives that followed clearly targeted perceived teacher failures, tightening top-down control and mandating standardization in response (Cooper & Conley, 1991; Hallinger & Richardson, 1988; Smylie & Denny, 1990).

The effective schools movement had a profound effect on educational reform. In the first wave, emphasis was placed on the principal as an instructional leader within the traditional top-down organizational structure. In the second wave, however, the emphasis shifted to participative leadership, bringing together three concepts in school leadership: instructional leadership, teacher leadership, and shared governance. Leaning more toward instructional leader, the role of the principal had shifted away from administrator. After reviewing empirical literature on the dual role of the principal as leader and hierarchal player in school effectiveness, Hallinger and Heck (1996) concluded that “principal leadership can make a difference in student learning” (p.



37) and that “principal leadership that makes a difference is aimed toward influencing internal school processes that are directly linked to student learning” (p. 38). They concluded that their discovery of the indirect effects of principal leadership on school achievement verifies, “achieving results through others is the essence of leadership” (p. 39). Based on research presented so far and to follow the terms effective school is sinuously connected with effective principals who are by definition effective instructional leaders who have the goal of placing improvement in student achievement at the forefront.

In Williams’ (2001) study, the term *effective* is associated with those practices and activities that are related to the school’s major focus. The study involved high schools in Tennessee with enrollments of 1000 or more students. An Audit of Principal Effectiveness was sent to the twenty randomly selected participating schools. Surveys were mailed to 690 teachers, 410 of whom responded. An analysis of variance was used to determine whether there was a difference between the teachers’ and the principals’ perspectives on principal involvement in planning, monitoring, and evaluating the instructional program. Results suggested that principals who demonstrate strong feelings about the importance of instruction tend to lead their schools to the most gains.

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the link between instructional leadership and achievement. Empirical research by Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee (1982) revealed a correlation between strong instructional leadership and school effectiveness (p. 39). Marzano (2000) reviewed and synthesized research on school effectiveness from the last four decades. He concluded that

Three categories of variables have identifiable and somewhat stable influences on student achievement. Specifically, a case can be made that the percentage of variance accounted for by the three categories of variables are as follows: (a) student background: 80.00%; (b) school level: 6.66%; and (c) teacher level: 13.34%. (p. 77)

Marzano noted, however, that these estimates are conservative due to the fact that all variances could not be attributed to classroom level or school level factors were attributed to student background characteristics. The principal as instructional leader has the opportunity to change a school's staff development methods based on the needs of that school as reflected by student achievement, a strategy suggested by Marzano's (2000) synthesized research. Marzano studied the impact of schooling on student achievement and, from his findings, developed models for staff development, evaluation, and achieving data-driven school improvement. His work included the research of Wang, Haertel, and Walberg, which synthesized empirical and theoretical findings on variables affecting school learning. They organized 228 identified variables influencing student learning into 30 categories and six "theoretical constructs." Using average *T* score values to rank the top five variables, they found classroom management to be the most important variable influencing student learning, student use of metacognitive strategies to be second, and student use of cognitive strategies to be third; home environment and parental support ranked fourth in importance, and student-teacher social interactions was the least important of the top five variables (Marzano, 2000, p. 30).

Developing the case further that the effective school is one with an effective principal as instructional leader, Blase and Blase (1999) emphasized the need for the principal to spend more time in the classroom. Validating this need and lack of time, Martin and Willower's (1981) study indicated that principals spend only 9% of their time in classrooms. This point of principal low percentage of time is repeated later and mentioned in several studies reviewed. Cotton (2003) further emphasized that a principal's actions do not exist in isolation; instead, as the review of studies indicates, "effective principals are at the center of curricular and instructional improvements within their schools" (p. 25). Their findings indicate that teachers find effective

principals to be the ones who have interaction with teachers and encourage reflection on teaching practices. Principals who held post-observational conferences that encouraged teachers to reflect by making suggestions, giving feedback, modelling, inquiring, soliciting advice and opinions, and giving praise were valued as effective leaders.

A review of 135 studies related to the nature, causes, and consequences of principal behaviors and practices, Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1990) concluded that more research is needed on how the principal's leadership affects teachers and student improvement:

“(a) a more comprehensive array of student outcomes; (b) characteristics of teachers' practices generated from theories of teacher development; and (c) the culture of the school” (pp. 22-23).

After examining six categories of leadership, including instructional leadership, that have dominated educational thought during the twentieth century, Leithwood and Duke (1999) concurred, “there is much to be learned from further development of existing concepts” (p. 67).

Taff's 1997 study used the *Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale* (PIMRS) by Hallinger (1982) to measure teacher perspectives on the role of the principal and the *Survey of Professional Staff Perspectives of Effective Schools Correlates* (ESS) by Rauhauser to measure teacher perspectives on school effectiveness. The PIMRS is used to show the degree to which the principal is perceived to be involved in specific instructional leadership behaviors in the school. The correlation between the two surveys demonstrated that teachers who perceived their schools to be effective also viewed their principals to be good instructional leaders. Results of this study correlate with information reviewed in other literature and will be further applied in the present study.

Hallinger and Heck (1998) noted that using statistical methods proved inconclusive due to conceptual limitations. Further study was recommended in order to design questions that

would add to the knowledge of how leadership influences student learning. They suggested that leadership contributes more indirectly to the desired outcomes of the school (p. 167). Hallinger and Heck further stated, “mediated-effect studies . . . offer concrete indications of possible means through which leadership may achieve an impact on the school’s outcomes and effectiveness” (p. 167). It was concluded that principals do have an impact on school effectiveness and learning in a multilevel process that varies from school to school.

*Change: The Effective Principal Instructional Leadership*

A good leader involves others in the organization when deciding what changes are needed and in determining a method for initiating those changes based on the needs of the school (Blase & Blase, 1998). Generally speaking, a school leader is a principal who has knowledge of the ways in which a school and its district envision the needs of that school. The principal has an opportunity to oversee the methods used to improve schools based on the goals and visions of the stakeholders (Delapp, 1988). Principals who strive to be instructional leaders and who want enduring change in their schools must take a community building approach (Sergiovanni, 1998). Community building requires leadership that promotes effective schools as described by Marzano et al. (2000) and instructional leadership practices delineated in the following sections.

Heck and Hallinger (1999) described the historically traditional school structure as a strict hierarchy of authority; power belonged to those at the top who operated the school according to formal rules, regulations, and policies. From this bureaucratic-rational and structural-functional perspective, the majority perspective of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, schools were viewed as “closed systems whose purpose was to maintain equilibrium as they strove to accomplish set goals or purposes” (Heck & Hallinger, 1999, p. 144). In accordance with this perspective, the role of the principal as school leader was to manage and maintain the

school. According to Edmonds (1979), the principal's instructional leadership was essential to school effectiveness. Phillips (2004) noted that "Among Edmonds' findings were other instructional dimensions credited to the principal and linked to effectiveness: high expectations, an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, an emphasis on acquisition of basic skills, and methods for frequent monitoring of student and teacher progress" (p. 8).

After reviewing empirical literature on the dual role of the principal as leader and hierarchal player in school effectiveness, Hallinger and Heck (1996) concluded that "principal leadership can make a difference in student learning" (p. 37) and that "principal leadership that makes a difference is aimed toward influencing internal school processes that are directly linked to student learning" (p. 38). They concluded that their discovery of the indirect effects of principal leadership on school achievement verifies that "achieving results through others is the essence of leadership" (p. 39). William's (2001) results suggested that principals who demonstrate strong feelings about the importance of instruction tend to lead their schools to the most gains.

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the link between instructional leadership and achievement. Empirical research by Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee (1982) revealed a correlation between strong instructional leadership and school effectiveness (p. 39). Marzano (2000) reviewed and synthesized research on school effectiveness from the last four decades. The principal as instructional leader has the opportunity to change a school's staff development methods based on the needs of that school as reflected by student achievement, a strategy suggested by Marzano's (2000) synthesized research.

Major findings in studies have revealed that teachers, principals, and school boards are similar in their expectations of principals (Williams, 2001). The competency requirements as

outlined by Williams show that principals should be proficient in community relations, pupil personnel services, pupil control, and personnel services. These areas were stressed as having the highest priority. The findings indicate that areas dealing with the human aspects of the school were most important. Phillips (2004), in a study on the practice of supervision by the principal, reported that

Pajak (1989) and a team of doctoral researchers from the University of Georgia established a list of twelve tasks associated with supervision. Communication was ranked first in order of importance and was followed, in rank order, by tasks related to staff development, instructional program improvement, and collaborative work on planning and change, and motivation and organization focused on the shared vision. Tasks related to observation, curriculum, problem solving and decision-making, and support to teachers was ranked, respectively, in the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth ranks of importance. Personal development and community relations were ranked tenth and eleventh, and, interestingly, the task ranked as least important was program evaluation and research. Glickman et al. (2001) identified five tasks of supervision, a component of instructional leadership, that have the potential to affect teacher development and, thereby, student outcomes: direct assistance, group development, professional development, curriculum development, and action research. They asserted that “the unification of individual teacher needs with organizational goals in ‘a cause beyond oneself’ has been demonstrated to promote powerful instruction and improved student learning” (p. 12). Thus, what is clear from the tasks and functions identified by Pajak (1989) and Glickman (1985) is that instructional leadership has as its focus the organization’s practical purpose of affecting the growth of students, primarily through teachers. (p. 63)

Synthesizing studies by Mendez-Morse, Peterson, Gok and Warren, and Scheurich, Cotton (2003) indicated that principals who make a difference in student achievement typically incorporate all stakeholders in a vision in order to encourage that it becomes a reality. Setting goals that are tied to the vision and accomplishing these goals one by one are important for overall success. Role perspective studies have recently focused on how principals spend their day. Studies have shown that the principal’s day is divided into many brief periods of task-oriented activities that change in priority each day and throughout the day. A large number of principals spend their day in an office surrounded by tasks related to running the school’s office,

meeting district requirements, and considering personnel and community needs. Principals of those studied had not spent appropriate time visiting classrooms (Martin & Willower, 1981; Willis, 1980).

### *Change: Related to Improvement*

The main purpose of this study is to examine how teachers' perspectives on the instructional leadership of principals affect change in classroom practices. This section reviews literature directly related to teachers' perspectives on principals, instructional leadership, change, and student achievement. Blase and Blase (1999), in their study of teachers' perspectives on the instructional leadership of principals, gathered data from 809 teachers and found that principals who talk to teachers, help them grow, and promote their reflection are perceived as more effective. Although the benefits of classroom observation cannot be ignored, research also supports the need for teacher autonomy. According to Cotton (2003), "The research on principals of high-performing schools finds that they allow teachers more instructional autonomy than principals do in less-effective schools" (p. 32). This somewhat contradictory view requires the principal to establish a balance between observation of instructional approaches and teacher autonomy. Firestone and Wilson (1985) stated, "With regard to the question of what principals can do to contribute to student achievement, this study reinforces the view that principals contribute most by supporting teachers' efforts . . . and giving them autonomy" (as cited in Cotton, 2003, p. 33). Heck and Marcoulides (1993) put it more tersely, reporting that principals enhance student achievement by "leaving them alone to teach" (as cited in Cotton, 2003, p. 33).

Ebert and Stone (1988) found that principals do make a difference in areas of student achievement. They gathered data from a national representative sample of 14,000 elementary students from over 300 schools. A battery of statistical tests and sampling was used to code

(using such variables as LEAD, INSTR, CONFL, and FACE) and to correlate the data collected (using MEAN and the Chi-squared test). The study used pre- and post-test data from standardized test scores in mathematics and “detailed characteristics of teachers and their instructional choices and methods, and detailed information on the characteristics and behavior of principals” to assess “under ceteris paribus conditions many of the standing conclusions regarding principal effectiveness” (pp. 291-292). The literature reviewed for their study addressed two major questions: “(a) do principals affect student achievement, and (b) if so, what elements of principal behavior are effective?” (p. 292). In their study, the principals emphasized to their teachers clear objectives and priorities. The elements of principal behavior perceived to be effective will also be addressed in this present study. Specifically, whether the participating principal has established clear objectives and priorities for their teachers will be investigated. Ebert and Stone looked at how strongly principals feel about instruction, whether they communicate their ideas concerning instruction, and to what extent they assume responsibility for instruction. They pointed out that the administrator who focuses this much attention on instruction is rare, noting previous studies that indicate that administrators spend only a small percent of their time in the classroom. The two major conclusions drawn from their study are listed below:

1. Principal leadership in instructional activities and in conflict resolution is clearly important to student achievement, but strong leadership outside these areas is not.
2. Divergence of opinion (loss of consensus) between teachers and the principal over the principal’s effectiveness in resolving conflicts also appears to retard student achievement. (p. 298)

Thirty-one of the studies associated the principal’s role in school effectiveness with instructional leadership: “Schools that make a difference in students’ learning are led by principals who make a significant and measurable contribution to the effectiveness of staff and in



the learning of pupils in their charge” (p. 158). They also noted that the conceptual diversity of schools, students, teachers, and leaders causes a problem for researchers: the “casual relationships” formed within a school make it difficult to formulate an accurate and testable theory (p. 160). The prospect of demonstrating a direct effect of principal leadership has been shown to have severe limitations.

### *School Change for Student Improvement*

The purpose of this section is to clarify further the connection between effective schools and the effective principal instructional leader as an advocate of change to improve student achievement.

One aspect of leadership that is directly related to the present study is the initiation of change to meet school goals and objectives (Marzano, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1997). A good leader involves others in the organization in deciding what changes are needed and in determining a method for initiating those changes based on the needs of the school (Blase & Blase, 1998). As times have changed, this organizational structure has been replaced, and the principal’s role has shifted from manager to leader (Delapp, 1988). The effective principal is the instructional leader in effective schools that improves student achievement through changes implemented by teachers who are involved and monitor the processes of change and improvement goals.

Furthermore, in an effort to reform leadership in schools, the National Center for Educational Leadership developed a study to discover what schools could learn from business, military, and public administrators; accordingly, the study was comprised of scholars and professionals from all kinds of occupations other than education (Leithwood, 1994). Key to these findings was that schools must leave outdated practices behind and discover new practices that are in line with reform movements that have inundated the educational field for more than four

decades. Sergiovanni (1998) stated that “Deep change, in other words, requires the reconstruction of existing individual and collective mindscapes of practice. Mindscapes are implicit mental frames through which the reality of schooling and our place in it are envisioned” (p. 577).

The effective principal is the leader of change. After conducting a case study on teacher perspectives on principal effectiveness, Isom (1986) reported that principal effectiveness often resides in the beliefs and perspectives of those with whom the principal works. The study was designed to assess how teacher perspectives on principal leadership affect classroom change. Isom used a modified version of Gaslin’s *Staff Evaluation of Administrative Performance* questionnaire and interviews for data collection. The questionnaire was given to 130 high school teachers in East St. Louis and included questions regarding number of year’s experience, grade level taught, and prior administrative or supervisor experience. Isom used quantitative statistical methods to code the responses. The study found that there is a “need to improve the principal’s performance as educational leader and to guide teachers in perceiving and appreciating such improvement in order to create an ideal learning climate in high school” (p. 2). Although this study involved teacher perspectives, there was little attention given to the interview process. The study involved the chi-squared test, the Pearson/Product Moment correlation coefficient, and analysis of variance. These tools are good statistical tests, but they are not the preferred methodology for recording perspectives or coding interviews.

Regarding the way that changes in social structures have influenced our educational structures, Schlechty (2001) wrote,

When the rate of change outside an organization is greater than the rate of change inside, the continuing existence of that organization is threatened. American society, the external environment for U.S. schools, has been experiencing dramatic shifts in structure over the past half century. (p. 1)

The need to emphasize leadership over management has not gone unnoticed (Schlechty, 2001), but despite this recognition, change has been slowed by the traditional mechanisms still in place in schools. Heck and Hallinger (1999) claimed that “variants of structural-functionalism continue to maintain a strong grip on the field of educational administration” (p. 145). According to Sergiovanni (2001), the emphasis on change brought about by effective instructional leadership is the foundation for developing deep change that will be carried out in the classroom by the teachers to improve student achievement. He further noted that “change strategies based on bureaucratic, personal, and market forces overlook the importance of helping teachers to develop new understandings of the subjects they teach and new understandings of how students learn”(pp. 583-584). The need for a collaborative culture is paramount to developing the deep change, brought about by effective instructional leadership that can improve student learning. The study proposed by this researcher would emphasize data collection through interviews and follow grounded theory methodology.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methods to be used in this study. Chapter 4 is about the data collected. Chapter 5 will present the results of this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### *METHODOLOGY*

This chapter on methodology explains how the procedures of the proposed study will examine teachers' perspectives on how the principal's instructional leadership affects change directed at student improvement. This chapter includes five sections. The first section presents symbolic interactionism, the theoretical perspective on which the study is based. The second section describes the site and sample selection process. The third section describes the data collection procedures: interviews, field notes, and document collection. Presented in the fourth section is an in depth discussion of grounded theory methodology and the stages and components of constant comparative analysis. The final section discusses credibility and ethical issues that will inform the gathering of data. Qualitative inquiry will be used because, as Merriam (1998) stated, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6).

#### Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework that guides the investigation of social behavior and interaction among human beings. The purpose of this study is to describe teacher perspectives of the principal as a leader of change targeted at student achievement. The researcher proposes to investigate teacher perspectives of how the principal is effectively involved in implementing changes meant to improve classroom instruction and academic performance.

According to Mead (1934), individuals within a certain environment who share similar characteristics or goals are interactive in social behavior and adjust themselves to satisfy the expectations of the social group. Perspectives are formed based on the social interactions of the people involved; therefore, the guiding emphases of the perspectives formed within the group are interactive. Blumer (1969) defines *symbolic interactionism* as “activity in which humans interpret each other’s gestures and act on the basis of meaning yielded by interpretation” (pp. 65-66). Symbolic interactionism deals with the social nature of humans and how within social groups, standards and ideals are what define that social group. Mead (1934) wrote that humans are best understood through their actions, which include physical and cognitive actions.

Blumer’s (1969) framework of symbolic interactionism is built on three primary ideas: (a) individuals act toward objects in their environment based on the meanings those objects have for them; (b) these meanings develop from the social interactions individuals have with one another; and (c) individuals use an interpretive process to establish, modify, and make sense of those meanings. The first idea suggests that individuals actively respond to the stimuli of their environment. Their actions have purposeful plans and goals based on the meaning of those objects. The second idea of symbolic interactionism is that individuals develop meanings for objects through social interaction. Social objects include physical objects, human-made objects, animals, other people, ourselves, symbols, ideas, perspectives, and emotions (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1995). These objects have no true intrinsic meaning, only meaning based on their usefulness to individuals in a specific setting. In the proposed study, the meanings assigned to objects will be based on the social structure of the school where the participants work and relate. The third idea states that individuals use an interpretive process to make sense of the meanings they invest in objects. Social interaction is the process by which individual establish those

meanings. This interpretive process involves two steps. First, an individual thinks through the meanings an object has in order to identify which objects have meaning. Second, the individual selects, checks, suspends, regroupes, and transforms these meanings as conditions that apply to that object shift. Therefore, meanings are not static, according to Blumer, but change, as the situation requires.

This study will investigate teacher perspectives of principal effectiveness in implementing change. The methodologies most often used within the framework of symbolic interactionism are ethnography and grounded theory. Ethnography, a methodology derived from anthropology and anthropological theory, has been adopted by symbolic interactionism and adapted for its own purposes (Crotty, 1998, p. 4). Grounded theory can be viewed as a specific form of ethnographic inquiry (Merriam et al, 2002). Through a series of carefully planned steps, grounded theory studies yield theoretical ideas. Throughout this process, emerging theory must arise from the data and not from some other source. Grounded theory is a process of inductive theory building based totally on observation and analysis of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1999).

Grounded theory methodology requires the researcher to immerse himself in the chosen environment when collecting data. Initial observations allow the researcher to describe the social structures, observe patterns of behavior, and begin to understand the environment (Merriam et al, 2002). In addition to more formal observations, interviews, usually informal in nature, are conducted. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described a good interview as one that produces “rich data” and helps reveal the perspective of the interviewee (p. 96). Other sources of data used by grounded theory researchers include information obtained from records, policy documents, newspaper and television coverage, and fictional descriptions that help to expand and further clarify the database. Glaser and Strauss (1999) referred to these various forms of data as “slices

of data” that insure density and provide different perspectives for understanding social phenomena (p. 66).

### Statement of Research Purpose and Questions

The overall questions guiding this study is whether teacher perspectives of principal leadership play a role in how effective the overall school is in implementing change to increase student achievement. The initial guiding questions include the following:

1. Has the principal made effort to implement change in instruction?
2. What processes did the principal use to define *change* as it relates to classroom instruction?
3. Did teachers implement the changes requested by the principal instructional leadership, why or why not?
4. Were teachers involved in defining what changes were needed and the goal of those changes?

### Site and Sample Selection

Purposeful sampling will be used to select the site and the participants for this qualitative research study. According to Merriam (1998), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). The researcher will do all he can to maximize the data through information rich sources and avoid generalization. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described purposeful sampling as a sampling process that includes participants because “they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (p. 65). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the purpose of sampling is to allow the researcher to maximize

information collection from information-rich data sources about the study topic. Therefore, the site selected for the study will provide data sources that are information-rich.

### Site Selection

The methods to be used for site selections are recommendations by Patton (2002) in his discussion of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work. The study will be conducted in middle schools located in the rural area of northeast Georgia. This area was selected because of its commitment to staff development to improve student achievement:

1. The school system and administration are willing to cooperate with the researcher and accept the methodology described in this chapter.
2. The instructional leader of the middle school has sought to implemented change directed at student improvement.
3. The middle school is considered an "improving" school according to criteria established by the State of Georgia in the most recent Report Card rating system.
4. The instructional leader of the middle school has sought to promote professional development of teachers.

### Sample Selection

Theoretical sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, will be used to select research participants. Theoretical sampling, an essential component of grounded theory methodology, will be used to select research participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The total sample will not be specified ahead of data collection: "Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop this theory as it emerges" (p. 45). The sample will be chosen based on (a) the willingness of the administration and



teachers to participate in this study and (b) the extent to which the school is growing in stature and continually making gains in student achievement. Quantitative data provided by the State Department School Report Card will be used to determine the latter. Participants in the study will be provided with information about the study, including information about authorization, purpose, duration, participant responsibilities, and participant anonymity issues. The participants will be given the opportunity to participate or to decline to participate. Those who agree to participate will be given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and their role in it. All participants will provide informed written consent and be provided the opportunity to review for accuracy.

#### Data Collection

To date, there has been no comprehensive data collected on teacher perspectives of principal leadership and instructional improvement. It is hoped that the study will be completed without interruption of data, meaning that all data will be collected, reviewed, and related to the study before any of the participants or the researcher reveals that data. Depending upon the final outcome, it is believed that revealing information to the principal or any other participant would be detrimental to all involved. An agreement of such disclosure will need to be made before the study begins. All participants will be interviewed in a previously determined location and data will be masked to protect the interviewee. Interviews will be conducted with administrators and randomly selected teachers who volunteer. Open-ended questions related to teacher perspectives will be asked.

#### Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory researchers simultaneously collect and analyze data from the initial phase of research. According to Strauss and Corbin (1994), “Grounded theory is a general

methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273). The grounded theory researcher allows data to emerge in a natural way during data collection. In the proposed study, the researcher expects to be guided by the data collected and to adjust the study according to the findings. In addition, grounded theory methodology allows themes to emerge through early data analysis and the discovery of basic social processes within data. In this study, grounded theory will be used to generate theories concerning teacher perspectives of the principal’s ability to implement change.

Grounded theory will be used for its natural methodology. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated that *methodology* refers to “the way in which we approach problems and seek answers” (p. 3). *Grounded theory*, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998), is “a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273). LeCompte and Preissle (1993) defined *theories* as “statements about how things are connected. Their purpose is to explain why things happen as they do” (p. 118). The use of grounded theory methodology leads to the purposeful discovery of theory derived directly from the data. Grounded theory methodology emphasizes the emergence and development of that theory, rather than relying on deductive reasoning based on prior theoretical frameworks (Charmaz, 1994). Since grounded theory is derived from “an initial, systematic discovery of the theory from the data of social research, it results in theory that will ‘fit and work’” (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 3). Glaser and Strauss went on to state, “Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research” (p. 6).

Charmaz (1994) suggested that emergence of theory grounded in data is facilitated by the use of several different strategies. First, as the researcher collects data, the researcher analyzes data, allowing the researcher to shape future data collection based on his or her interpretations of and discoveries in present data. Second, unlike research that is based on fitting data into logically deduced theoretical frameworks, grounded theory processes and products are shaped by the data. Third, verification is not treated as a necessary separate step in grounded theory. Instead, systematic checking of data and refining of categories is an on-going part of the methodology. Fourth, grounded theory focuses on process rather than on seeking to make a final interpretation.

Because the purpose of this study is to describe teacher perspectives of principal effectiveness in middle schools and because this research explores the meaning of this effectiveness as related to student achievement for those teachers, symbolic interactionism is an appropriate theoretical framework. Few studies have revealed evidence that teachers perceive leadership to be effective and responsible for increased student achievement. Consequently this study will focus on the social process through which teacher perspectives are treated as an integral part of improved instruction and student achievement. As Stern (1994) stated, “the strongest case for the use of grounded theory is in investigation of relatively uncharted waters” (p. 116).

#### Stages of Constant Comparative Analysis

A central component of grounded theory methodology is constant comparative analysis, which allows the researcher to compare data as it is collected. Merriam (1998) states:

Basically, the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. . . . Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. This dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to seek patterns in data. (p. 18)

This on-going process will keep the researcher abreast of data that needs further exploration and allow the researcher to investigate the data more thoroughly as it emerges.

The constant comparative analysis method involves four stages: comparing incidents, integrating categories and properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory. Constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) will be the method used to generate theories about teacher perspectives of effective principal leadership in a middle school. Using this four-stage process to analyze the data the researcher will produce a theory grounded in data.

#### *Stage One: Comparing Incidents*

Beginning with observing the data line by line, the researcher develops codes for incidents. Incidents are the small units of data that tells us what is happening in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once the interviews are transcribed, the researcher will review each incident, highlight significant ones, and make notes in the margins. Codes and labels that are introduced will be recorded. Labels will be used to find similar incidents in the other transcriptions. Data collection and analysis will continue as the researcher finds similar incidents within the labelled data and categories begin to emerge. Grouping similarly labelled incidents will lead to the formation of preliminary categories. The categories will help the researcher formulate follow-up interview questions to refine data and obtain necessary information.

The format of constant comparative analysis allows the researcher to code incidents, and compare codes for grouping into similar or new categories. This requires a continuous review of all data collected by the researcher. Throughout the process, the researcher will keep notes as memos for review and comparisons: “Memos are written elaborations of ideas about the data and the coded categories” (Charmaz, 1994, p. 106). Memoing is a method to help the researcher keep

track of codes and categories used in reviewing transcripts. Memos are treated similarly to data and are integrated with the data through further analysis (Charmaz, 1994).

#### *Stage Two: Integrating Categories and Their Properties*

As comparative analysis continues, the data begins to become more integrated and themes within the data begin to emerge. Data that reflect similar themes are put into categories. This arduous task allows the researcher to further examine similarities and differences within the data set.

#### *Stage Three: Delimiting the Theory*

In stage three, the researcher formulates a clear simple theory grounded in the smaller sets of relevant data. In this process of grouping similarities or overlapping categories into one, the researcher continually compares and groups relevant data while removing irrelevant data. The data that is removed no longer fits into the emerging theory (Glaser, 1994). Theoretical saturation is determined to limit data. Theoretical saturation is reached when the collected data no longer adds to the data set or categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once the researcher is convinced that new categories exist for the collected data, follow up interviews will be arranged. The emerging theory will be refined following those interviews.

#### *Stage Four: Writing the Theory*

In this culminating stage, theory that has emerged from data categories is formulated. When writing theory, the researcher re-examines coded data for specific examples for validation and illustration of theory (Glaser, 1994).

## Components of Constant Comparative Analysis

The components of each stage that remain constant are theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and theoretical pacing. All of these are necessary for integration and dense theory development.

### Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is the researcher's ability to code and analyze data in a way that generates meaning. Theoretical sensitivity is a personal characteristic of the researcher (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that experience and professionalism tend to increase. The researcher of this study has many experiences with the past leadership of his school as well as experience with five other principals. These experiences will allow the researcher to have a better understanding of the research setting.

### Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is a procedure used during data collection, coding, and analysis (Glaser, 1978). The researcher collects data and begins coding when similar incidents are found; other incidents can be added to deepen insight into the data.

### Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical saturation occurs when no new categories emerge from the data and all new data fits into previously established categories (Glaser, 1978).

## Theoretical Pacing

Theoretical pacing refers to the pace at which the research proceeds. Generating grounded theory takes time. Glaser (1978) delineated two stages of theoretical pacing: input (data collection) and saturation.

## Credibility

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the research process and the theory generated from that process (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). A study can be considered credible if the findings represent the realities of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The criteria used for this study is to enhance credibility and will be discussed in the following section.

### Credibility Criteria: Fit, Work, and Relevance

Grounded theory methods include automatic ways to enhance the credibility of a study. The use of constant comparative analysis allows the researcher to make credible matches between categories and interviewee perspective's. Joint data collection and analysis ensures the data's fit, work, and relevance to emerging theory (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

*Fit* means that the theory is directly derived from the data. The data must lead the researcher to discover categories and not be manipulated into pre-established categories. *Work* means that the theory generates explanations of what is happening in the research setting. These items are confirmed by the researcher during follow-up interviews with the participants, who will indicate whether the categories are valid. *Relevance* means that the categories mean something to the research setting, which occurs only when the categories are not forced but emerge from the data (Glaser, 1978).

### Prolonged Engagement

The researcher will spend a significant time in the research setting to become familiar with the setting and participants. Further knowledge will be gained about the data sources used in the study.

### Triangulation

Triangulation will also be used to increase credibility. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data and methods to confirm the emerging theory and explain findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Multiple documents, participants, and field will be obtained to verify data gathered from participant responses.

### Member Checking

Member checking is the most critical way to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is taking data, findings, and interpretations back to the participants for their agreement or disagreement (Merriam, 1998). The researcher of this study will member check with each participant to make sure emerging categories and theories make sense.

### Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing involves a communication process with a peer to provide an external check on the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This consultation helps keep the researcher honest; biases, methodological procedures, and interpretations of findings are questioned and clarified. Peer debriefing helps remove “emotions and feelings that may be clouding good judgment or preventing emergence of sensible next steps” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308).



### Thick Description

Thick description is another method for providing credibility because it helps others understand the findings of the study and determine the transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

### Summary

This chapter explained the methodology of the study. Symbolic interactionism and grounded theory were both discussed as the framework for this study. Data sources were indicated: interviews and document collection. Constant comparative analysis will be used throughout the process to code and analyze data to allow theories about teacher perspectives of effective principal leadership to emerge. Many strategies for enhancing credibility were explained.

Chapter 4 is about the data collected. Chapter 5 will present the results of this study.

## CHAPTER 4

### *FINDINGS*

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers' perspectives on how the principal's instructional leadership affects change directed at student improvement in middle school. To achieve the purposes of the study and to arrive at theory grounded in the data, the researcher analyzed the interview responses of ten participants about their individual perspectives on the principal's instructional leadership. Using grounded theory methodology, the researcher identified the theoretical ideas that emerged from analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

There are two major sections in this chapter. The first section provides an introduction of the individual participants in the study, and the second section provides a review of common topics. The topics are organized, in accordance with the taxonomy shown in Table 4.1, into three main themes and eight categories.

#### *Common Themes and Categories*

Three major themes and seven categories with fifteen sub-categories emerged from the data analysis to explicate the participants' perspectives principal's instructional leadership affects to change. According to the participants in this study, they formed relationships and interacted with subject peers through meetings involved with implementing change. The teachers also experienced many outcomes from these meetings. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the themes and categories discussed by the participants. As shown, each theme serves as an umbrella for the categories related to it. In the following sections of this chapter, each theme and category

significant to the participants' perspectives on educational leadership is discussed. Excerpts from the participant transcripts are used to support the findings and to illuminate the participants' perspectives.

In the following sections of this chapter, each theme significant to the participants' perspectives on the leadership process to implement change is discussed. Excerpts from the participant transcripts are used to support the findings and to illuminate the participants' perspectives.

Table 4.1

*Themes, Categories, and Sub-Categories Related to teachers' perspectives on how the principal's instructional leadership affects change directed at student improvement in middle school.*

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#### Theme 1: Relationships

##### Category 1: Efforts to Implement Change

Sub-category 1: Georgia Performance Standards

Sub-category 2: Maintaining Initiatives

##### Category 2: Support Groups

Sub-category 1: Grade Level Meetings

Sub-category 2: Support Subject Area Meetings

#### Theme 2: Process of Implementation

##### Category 1: Receiving Support with Curriculum

Sub-category 1: Understanding the curriculum

Sub-category 2: Maintaining curriculum pacing

Sub-category 3: Sharing materials and resources

Category 2: Receiving Support with Instruction

Sub-category 1: Implementing instructional programs

Sub-category 2: Learning new instructional strategies

Sub-category 3: Common Assessments

Category 3: Receiving Support with Classroom Management

Sub-category 1: Managing time

Sub-category 2: Managing space

Sub-category 3: Managing student behavior

Theme 3: Outcomes

Category 1: Teacher Morale

Category 2: Changes in Classroom Instruction

Sub-category 1: Learning to plan using backward design

Sub-category 2: Implementing standards based instruction more efficiently

Category 3: Dealing With Leadership Programs

Sub-category 1: Lack of time

Sub-category 2: Changes for improvement

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Individual Participants

This section of Chapter 4 provides a description of each participant. The description introduces the participant and offers general information related to their individual experiences with the principal. The next section adds detail to these individual portraits, and as each one adds color to the painting of teachers' experiences in rural north Georgia, a collage of the participants

in their respective perspective of the principal's leadership related to change. In order to protect participants identity pseudonyms have been used.

### *Alpha*

Alpha is a veteran teacher at Zeta Middle School in rural Forsyth County. A native of Georgia, Alpha was hired directly after graduating. This was her first teaching position she has remained for nine years. At the time this study was conducted, she was teaching eighth grade. Alpha is a graduate of a small university in Georgia. She obtained a bachelor's degree in education in May before beginning her teaching career at Zeta. Alpha has since earned a Master's in Education, Specialist Degree in Education, and was voted teacher of the year. She has viewed as a leader within the school, being a department chair and a teacher of staff development. Alpha has worked with three different principals all at Zeta. When ask about implementing changes prescribed by the principal a very indignant response of "This one?" was given.

### *Beta*

Beta has taught English language arts at Zeta for 9 years. Beta had lived in this rural north Georgia County all her life attending schools within the county. Like Alpha her professional teaching career began at Zeta. Beta has earned a Bachelor's degree in English, MEd in English, and a Specialist degree. At the time of this study she was teaching both seventh and eighth grade. Beta has worked for three different principals. Beta has stated that she does what she thinks is best for her students while teaching the required standards.

### *Gamma*

Gamma began her teaching career 24 years ago. Gamma has taught at Zeta for 10 years. Gamma has a Bachelor's Degree, Master's degree, and is National Board Certified. Gamma was teaching

sixth and seventh grade social studies at the time of this study. She has worked for at least six different principals.

#### *Delta*

Delta had taught for twelve years at Zeta is a veteran teacher at Zeta Middle School in rural North Georgia County. A native of Georgia, Delta was hired directly after graduating. This was her first teaching position, she has remained here for 12 years. At the time this study was conducted, she was teaching physical education. Delta is a graduate of a small university in Georgia. She obtained a bachelor's degree in physical education. Delta has since earned a Master's in Education. Delta is considered a leader at Zeta due to her experience she is department head. She is a department head and worked through three principals.

#### *Eta*

Eta taught French for multiple grade levels at Zeta including sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Eta is an experienced businessman having worked in private industry for twenty years before changing careers to become a teacher. Eta is married with three children. Eta has worked under three principals. Eta has had similar difficulty with all three principals. Saying

Foreign language education is very different in middle school. They don't understand having mixed levels of students' abilities in a class where some students might be new to the foreign language with others that have one, two, or even three years of prior experiences. Having a standard test for all students and having common test with other languages just does not fit the student capabilities therefore does not offer proper assessment of those abilities.

#### *Theta*

Theta is veteran teacher having come to Zeta at the school opening she has twelve of years of teaching experience at this school. Zeta started teaching at Zeta as a technology teacher and was later moved to teaching mathematics, she now teaches eighth grade. She has also taught sixth and seventh grade. Theta has spent her entire life teaching and now has 28 years of

experience teaching middle grade students. Theta was moved to eighth grade to assist newer teachers in the grade level and help with standards implementation. Theta has been department chair for four years. She has worked with three principals at Zeta each with their own vision for the school. Zeta described changes that the principals have worked to implement just a matter of job saying “Each principal has a vision and implement changes they think will accomplish that vision, they are like the seasons each one is slightly but year after year they all are about the same just changing some of the vocabulary”.

### *Sigma*

Sigma teaches sixth and seventh grade advanced mathematics at Zeta and has completed four years at Zeta. Sigma previously taught fifth grade at an elementary school within the same school system. Sigma has a total of twenty years experience. She has worked for two principals at Zeta and three others at the elementary school. She has become a teacher leader and works very closely with the other school leaders. Saying

We are completely open with each other. However because the implementations of the standards do not come from our administrators, or our county we have to plan ways to use the best of the standards required by the state department of education. We all have to play the cards that we are dealt.

### *Iota*

Iota has taught science at both the sixth and eighth grade level. She had the position of graduation coach for one year and has now returned to the classroom. Iota has taught a total of twenty-one years with five of those years at Zeta. Iota’s previous teaching experience came from another school system within the state. The other system had a much diverse population then Zeta that helps her might the needs of students who our not necessarily on grade level. Iota has worked for three principals at Zeta and many others in her previous system. Iota has been known

to be very out spoken and has at times had difficulty working and implementing what the principals want. Saying

Their vision is not always clear to me and I am not sure exactly what they want and when they want it. Coming here one year and working with one principal for two years and then with another and now a year with another principal is confusing. Each one wants students to improve and they all have a different idea on how to get that improvement.

*Kappa*

Kappa is currently the assistant principal at Zeta. He served in the same capacity at another school in the county. Kappa had previously taught mathematics in middle school and has worked under three principals in this school system. Teaching mathematics gives him some insight into the teaching and implementation of standards for the mathematics curriculum.

*Rho*

Rho was a retired teacher from the northeast where he taught social studies for thirty-four years. In the northeast Rho was accustomed to working in union protected schools. He has now taught thirty-nine years with five years at Zeta and serving three principals there. Rho has been very verbal about what the unions would not allow and how that is different from schools in Georgia.

I was a union representative and we had specific work hours. Administrators could not ask you to have a meeting beyond those hours, chaperone dances, supervise lunch or work hours that were not covered in the contract. Also the teaching pedagogy was left to the teachers we did not go over standards with administrators. If the test scores met the goals of the contract that was all that was needed.

### *Theme 1: Relationships*

*Theme 1: Relationships* is a broad conceptual theme that captures the participants' perspectives of the experiences they shared with their leaders. As the findings reveal, relationships developed between the teacher and leadership interaction display their experiences in a variety of ways. Nine of the participants in the study described being in a distant relationship



with their leader. Through their interviews, they identified two aspects of these relationships as being most important in developing a positive relationship with their leadership. The participants identified these as *having accessibility to their leader* and *receiving personal support from their leadership*. In the following sections, each category is defined and described, and examples are presented to illustrate it.

#### *Category 1: Efforts to Implement Change*

*Efforts to Implement Change* refers to the leadership being available to provide support when the teacher needed assistance. In talking about accessibility to their leadership, participants discussed three sub-categories: (a) *Georgia Performance Standards*, (b) *Understanding Initiatives through frequent contact*, and (c) *accessible in times of confusion*.

Seven of the teachers felt the relationship they had developed with their leader was enhanced by the accessibility of their leader. In this study, the term *accessibility* is defined as being available when needed and is not solely measured in terms of physical proximity. The teachers experienced this accessibility to their leaders when the leader assisted them with the myriad types of information disseminated in employee development meeting or offered to help them transition into an established classroom. The participants also experienced accessibility to their leaders when the leader maintained frequent contact on a regular basis. While close physical proximity was not a criterion for leader accessibility, several teachers felt that having classrooms visits by their leaders' enhanced their relationship.

#### *Sub-category 1: Georgia Performance Standards.*

*Georgia Performance Standards* refers to the moment when the leader assumed the role by instructional leader by making standards known for all teachers. It was through this contact

that the teacher gained insight into the role her leader would fill during the course of implementation.

As Iota recalled,

I knew the new Georgia Performance Standards were coming in this year but I did not know that the instructional leadership to implement those standards was coming from the administration.

Alpha had been employed at Zeta for a number of years and experienced little interaction with leaders when it came to standards. In spite of her familiarity with the school system, she still felt overwhelmed by the volume of material covered during the system's Georgia Performance Standards meeting with teachers. When Alpha brought up the topic of accessibility to her leader, she emphasized that the leaders listened to her comments but did not act upon them, instead she felt they were allowing her to blow off steam and then proceed with the same course of action. Alpha felt that her leader did not understand how trying her situation was.

Like Alpha, Beta had also worked in the same system for many years. This allowed her the ability to understand the system in place and how the leaders instructed teachers. Beta did believe the instructional leaders had a clear understanding of the standards to be implemented. Therefore their guidance was limited to items in general.

### *Sub-category 2: Maintaining Initiatives*

*Maintaining Initiatives* refers to providing opportunities for teachers and their leader to communicate both formally and informally about concerns and issues on a frequent basis. The teachers found this frequent contact beneficial in seeking input from their leaders as well as in sharing with their leader concerns or issues that developed.

Iota and her leader had frequent opportunities to talk about concerns that emerged during the implementation: However the frequency of conversations led to a further divide between leader and teacher regarding initiatives. Iota did add the comment:

I think it impacted me tremendously for her to be so available, especially as far as getting started and some of the techniques of things I had trouble with or I needed more knowledge about. Being there and having that experience to share is definitely something that is the key to helping other people and helping the kids to succeed.

Iota recognized that the potential of her leader's help was based on her leader's years of experience in the classroom. She also recognized the benefit of having a leader who was "so available" to evaluate her performance in the classroom.

When Sigma accepted the teaching position at the school, she immediately asked her principal, "Who is my department leader?" As Sigma explained, she wanted to "know who to run to" with her questions or concerns. Sigma's leader fulfilled this need by making herself easily accessible to Sigma, as she said "My department leader was another grade level and hard to interact with because of the physical separation". Her leader was there to help more readily. Sigma seemed appreciative that her leader checked with her often to see if she needed materials or assistance: "She was there every time I needed her. That way I didn't always feel like I was running to her and bothering her."

Alpha stated the initiatives started one year would be changed the next year before measurable goals on the effectiveness of those initiatives could be obtained. As Alpha shared:

Even though I expressed my concerns over this issue the leader told me the initiatives were the same but we changed the name to be more in line with certain county directives.

Unlike Alpha and her leader, Delta and her leader rarely spoke during the day. The leader was rarely around to offer direction. These meetings had to take place well before the students arrived because of various morning duties.

## *Category 2: Support Groups*

*Support Groups* refers to the leadership providing support through their leadership or other leaders available within the school or department. Eight of the ten teachers in the study mentioned occasions when their leader had provided them with a means to add support. Five of the teachers also shared experiences in which their leader had provided them with a direction toward additional resources. It was through these experiences that the teacher and leader developed a relationship built on the foundation of support.

### *Sub-category 1: Grade Level Meetings.*

*Grade Level Meeting* refers to experiences in which the teachers received support from fellow teachers who were capable of making contributions. Although the administration facilitated these meetings it was teacher interaction that helped. The most beneficial of these was when a subject area met as a sub group to share ideas of implementation.

It was during these meetings that Alpha and Iota shared ideas that would help the transition and/or incorporate changes that the leaders wanted implemented.

Iota stated:

There were a couple of times that within our grade level, there were little issues that came up, and being new to this grade level, I didn't feel comfortable saying anything to the rest of my grade level. I was not able to go my leader for help because I was forced into a grade level I did not want. I knew if I was frustrated with something, I could go to Alpha. She was experiencing similar frustrations implementing all the new concepts while incorporating changes the leaders wanted.

Frustration was also the impetus for Gamma seeking support from her leader when she was "a little flustered" in maintaining balance between curriculum and changes required:

There were a couple of times when I went to her a little flustered because I felt like all I was doing was working on changes. That type of work was not what I felt helped my students learn the material of the standards. The administration had required students to copy the standards into their agenda each day but this was not helping them learn the material.

Gamma went on to say that after talking with her leader about this concern, she felt even less support from her leader. She received comments such as “It’s County policy”. Gamma also shared that because of these comments she contacted former faculty members at other schools and realized that only Zeta was implementing these changes.

When Sigma started at Zeta after eight years in elementary schools she felt the leaders had less knowledge about curriculum than she was previously led to believe. It seemed to her the leaders were more concerned about doing things certain ways than they were about having students accomplish the mathematics criteria:

The students needed help with basic mathematics facts that should have been mastered at an earlier grade. I was questioning myself that something must be wrong because these students needed severe help. She knew I was stressed about that and said that I could purchase some materials and books that I felt would help. She just calmed me down at that point.

When Sigma received reassurance about her students’ abilities, she was ready to focus on how best to plan and implement instruction for her students. As she said, “Once I realized my kids were not so far behind where they were supposed to be, I was able to relax and figure out how to teach them.”

Like Sigma, Iota sought the support of her leader about her concern for students in her class. Iota had several students who were resistant to changes that were implemented including not understanding why they had to copy the standards that were not in a kid friendly language she was feeling:

My class had several continuous behavior problems that I worked with, and she helped me to develop a plan. One time, I just broke down, and I was just like, “I don’t know what to do!” and she just lifted me up and helped me to think positively about different items or aspects that we can do so that it would not be so overwhelming for me.

Because of the support she received from her leader in dealing with this conflict, Iota was able to reexamine the situation with her students and to generate additional strategies to assist her in working with them.

Delta reached out to her leader following another change in the schedule that further reduced her planning time by adding a support factor to other teachers. This included implementing a program related to bullying and helping teachers connect with their teachers.

We had a very disturbing meeting. There was a change from the state department of education reducing the physical education requirement therefore the leaders felt I would have the time to implement the program because of the reduction. I still carried it home on my shoulders and I was left with no choice in the matter.

In summary, the participants felt the changes desired and methods of implementation were more important to the leaders than the participants' professional opinions regarding the value of the programs. The support included the leader enabling some teachers a little variant in implementation but the participants felt it was only done as an appeasement. By working closely with other teachers of the same subject and desires provided more support and help in implementation than the leaders were providing.

### *Theme 2: Process of Implementation*

*Theme 2: Process of Implementation* is a theme that encompasses the participant's perspectives on what "getting help from their leaders" meant. As the findings reveal, the participants shared many interactions with their leaders and that through these interactions, information, ideas, and opinions were exchanged. According to the data, nine of the teachers and their leaders discussed those activities the teachers engaged in related to their classroom instruction, including the need for support in the areas of curriculum, instruction, classroom management, and parent interactions. Through their interviews, the participants identified three areas in which they received support through interactions with their leaders: (a) *receiving*

*support with curriculum, (b) receiving support with instruction, and (c) receiving support with classroom management.* In the following sections, these categories are defined and described, and examples are presented to illustrate each of them.

#### *Category 1: Receiving Support with Curriculum*

*Receiving support with curriculum* refers to the teacher receiving support with performing the necessary function of preparing the curriculum and support materials for delivery to students. Six of the teachers in the study received curriculum support from their leaders, including assistance in understanding of the curriculum, developing strategies to maintain curriculum pacing, and gathering materials and resources designed to enhance curriculum.

##### *Sub-category 1: Understanding the curriculum.*

*Understanding the curriculum* refers to the leader working with the teacher to learn ways to present the curriculum as it was designed to be presented. Understanding the curriculum requires a better understanding of the scope and sequence of the pacing as well as strategies to enhance implementation.

Eta received support from his leader with understanding that his school's Foreign Language curriculum was changing. Offering French to the students was no longer an option. Eta described the support given by her leader:

We are all on the same Foreign Language curriculum however there is no distinction between French and Spanish. Additionally there are plans to remove French and only support Spanish. Therefore I have to implement standards designed for Spanish in a French class.

Iota reached out to her leader for support with understanding the new Physical Science Curriculum. Iota's leader also a former science teacher, shared with Iota the curriculum techniques and procedures she had designed and implemented as a result of her own experience. Iota said, "I think her help was so general that it could be applied to several areas and was not as

specific as I desired.” I used some of her techniques with my students, but I was not completely comfortable.”

Gamma shared that when she first examined the social studies curriculum designed for her sixth and seventh graders, she “wondered how I would even begin to teach all of it to my students.” The terminology and focus used in the social studies curriculum was unlike any that she had seen, and the order in which the curriculum objectives were presented appeared to be disorganized and random. When she approached her leader with her concerns, Gamma “wondered how many times are we going to do this.”

Well, for one thing I had taught social studies for over 20 years and knew the social studies curriculum really well. She asked us to cut and paste our curriculum into three sections. The first section being habits of the mind, these are the ones that cover basic learning methods, second were task, third was actual content. I really never understood the point of that exercise.

*Sub-category 2: Maintaining Georgia Performance Standards pacing.*

*Maintaining Georgia Performance Standards pacing* refers to assisting the teacher in the process of determining the rate at which the Georgia Performance Standards needed to be taught in order to assure that the students have exposure to all of the standards during the year. Another driving factor for maintaining standards pacing is the need to expose students to all of the standards and objectives prior to standardized testing. Since this testing generally takes place approximately six weeks before the end of the school year, the need for maintaining standards pacing throughout the year is critical.

The prospect of standardized testing encompassing the entire standards prompted Alpha to seek the advice of her leader. When she shared with her leader her concern about covering the entire eighth grade science standards in preparation for the Criterion-Referenced Competency



Tests in the spring, her leader helped her to prepare a calendar that included “checkpoints” to assist Alpha in this endeavor. Alpha explained,

Each month we are supposed to be at a certain level. I was given a calendar, and by the end of September, I should have taught this certain thing. By October, I should have had other things I had taught. So it was just a timeline to give you a basis for what, or to let you know you are or where you should be in the standards.

In addition to helping her devise the standards-pacing calendar, fellow teachers also provided her with ongoing pacing support by “always sharing where each teacher in the subject areas and when they planned to test a particular unit.”

When Sigma reviewed the sixth grade standards, she became concerned about the “amount of standards that her students are expected to do before they pass.” She shared these concerns with her leader, who directed Sigma to the county coordinator for a timeline for introducing and implementing the standards in her classroom. By following this timeline, Sigma was able to maintain focus on the standards she was currently teaching to her students without feeling overwhelmed by the volume of standards yet to be taught.

*Sub-category 3: Sharing materials and resources.*

*Sharing materials and resources* refers to assisting the teacher with standards by making available to them materials and resources designed to enhance the standards. Several of the teachers’ leaders of participants in the study shared from their personal stores of materials and resources, while others provided the participants with materials and resources purchased by the school. The county provided additional materials and money in both mathematics and science.

Beta stated eighth grade teachers assisted her by sharing with her many of her own materials designed to support the standards:

We would get together when we would plan our lessons, something we have carried over to this year. The teachers in the whole group of teachers on the same grade level would plan when we needed materials and share them on the all. That helped me pace lessons so

we could trade off books, we would share from our resources and the schools. That was a big help.

Gamma's fellow teachers also shared with Gamma from their own materials designed to support the standards. As Gamma explained, "Being a veteran teacher, I had many of the materials that were needed, so I was happy to share." Gamma continued by saying, "We always borrow things. I would loan this and borrow that. We were constantly trading items."

In summary, the teachers in the study interacted more with fellow teachers by receiving information and ideas designed to support the standards. This support enhanced the teachers' understanding of the standards, assisted them in maintaining standards pacing, and provided them with materials and resources to reinforce the standards. It also added another element to the relationship between the teachers.

#### *Category 2: Receiving Support with Instruction*

*Receiving support with instruction* refers to the leader and teacher engaging in interactions for purposes related to instruction. Throughout the participants' discussions of the instructional support they received from their leaders, there were three recurring sub-categories: (a) *implementing instructional programs*, (b) *learning new instructional strategies*, and (c) *implementing changes*. According to the data, eight of the teachers received leader support with ways to implement and enhance student instruction, as well as understanding the connection between instruction and student improvement. The participants often initiated the interactions by asking questions, and the most frequently discussed instructional areas were science and mathematics.

##### *Sub-category 1: Implementing instructional programs.*

*Implementing instructional programs* refers to the assistance provided the participants in carrying out the instructional programs selected for their students. The leaders provided

assistance in accessing and utilizing the various components of the instructional programs, managing the common assessments implemented by the leaders, aggregating that data and motivating the students to reach higher levels of achievement.

Kappa sought insight from her leader in the area of mathematics. Kappa had taught in eighth grade, so when she accepted the teaching position, she had concerns about teaching algebra to students who, as she described them, “were still learning basic mathematics.” Her leader, who served as the mathematics consultant for the system, provided a great deal of instructional support for her. Kappa described this support:

In regards to algebra, I was totally new to teaching as a facilitator while implementing the task. That was completely new for me. So I had many questions about that how to manage my group, how to manage the paper work, and how to really motivate the kids so that they would want to participate in task as a way of learning because it is so long that it can get boring. Ways to motivate them so they would want to strive to score 85%, preferably 90% with accuracy. I just had so many questions about that. I would email her, and she was great about giving me responses about the new program. She knew that it was hard and directed me to the county coordinator. That did not help all that much.

Kappa incorporated much of the information and ideas recommended by the county into the algebra instruction he planned for his students. According to Kappa, using these ideas “helped to alleviate some of the stress that I was feeling in the beginning of the year in algebra but I was still unclear about the benefits.”

The foreign language program presented a challenge for Eta, who was not familiar with the common assessments requested by his school. As he said, “Testing French and Spanish on the same test eliminated many of the specifics for each language. It was how to intermingle other ways to teach grammar in common that was a big challenge.” Eta’s leader had not taught foreign language and very had few ideas on what was similar. Eta continued by saying, “She did sit in our grade level foreign language meeting and help identify common items.”

*Sub-category 2: Learning new instructional strategies.*

*Learning new instructional strategies* refers to learning ways to enhance opportunities for the students to reach the goals of the instructional program. The teachers most often sought the support of their leader to learn new instructional strategies in the areas of science and mathematics.

The mathematics program was an area in which Rho became concerned when his students were mastering the mathematics concepts when taught in isolation but were experiencing difficulty in transferring the concepts into other areas. Rho shared with his leader his concerns:

I felt like I needed to extend the mathematics task lessons because it seems not to transfer. They can solve individual problems fine but when you go to do something else, you want them to be able to sort it out. They just weren't doing as well as I wanted them to.

His teacher leader had experienced the same concerns with his students in the past and had developed a series of lessons designed to foster the transfer of the concepts into other areas. He shared these lessons with Rho, who used them to support the mathematics instruction in his classroom. As a result, Rho's students began to demonstrate the mathematics concepts into their algebra concepts in other areas of the standards.

Sigma approached her leader for instructional support in mathematics when some of her seventh grade students were experiencing problems in steps required to solve problems. Her leader suggested she incorporate a tactile approach into her mathematics instruction, which Sigma used: "She brought in Manipulative Mathematics and taught me how to teach that to those that were having trouble. That was very helpful at the beginning of the year when I was trying to figure out how to teach them so they would understand." Because of this experience, Sigma realized that her students learned in a number of different ways and that to promote student improvement, she had to be willing to utilize a number of instructional methods.

Gamma sought her leader's help in teaching social studies to her students. Her leader shared with Gamma an instructional strategy used in teaching a challenging science concept to eighth grade students. Gamma explained, "I went to her about teaching all of Africa and Asia. Because it's such large concept, she would tell me how to approach it. My students benefited from her explanation." Gamma later shared that the majority of her students continued to show mastery in breaking down the concepts required by the standards. Periodically throughout the social studies textbook: "Whenever the students had to compare and contrast they used this method so I felt when the CRCT rolls around their scores will be great."

*Sub-category 3: Common Assessments.*

*Common Assessments* refers to the teachers administering and or creating common assessment for their subject on each grade level. The Mathematics and English Language Arts are under mandate from the County Office to administer three common assessments throughout the year, one at 9 weeks, the second at 18 weeks, and the third at 27 weeks. Science, Social Studies, and Foreign Language were told by the school leaders to create common assessments to be used throughout the year. The teachers by subject and grade level gathered to create these assessments and load them into a testing software program called EduSoft.

Delta a physical education teacher and department chair was not sure how her department and teachers were going to meet these criteria. As Delta explained,

We decided since physical education was no longer required by law but was required to create a common assessment that these assessments would focus on sports. They were basic knowledge questions on how to formulate a set of fair rules for any sport. We also incorporated what attributes were required to display good sportsmanship qualities. That helped a lot.

Delta admitted she had been somewhat hesitant about asking her leader to come to the gym and assist with creating these assessments as she said, "It put pressure on me to be able to supply the

same type of instruction for all my students.” Her leader reassured her by reminding her that the main purpose was to provide standard based instruction to each group of students. Delta knew that her students changed every nine weeks and the activities were affected by the weather.

Sigma also was concerned about how common assessments were going to provide meaningful data when some of the students were in advanced classes, some in on level and some receiving remediation. After discussing this with her leader she was assured the assessment was not to compare classes of students but whether they were meeting the standards, Sigma expressed reassurance at “knowing how it worked” and gained confidence in moving ahead with the mathematics program

Both Sigma and Iota invited their leaders to review the common assessments that were going to be used to assess progress of the students meeting the standards required for their subject and grade level. Sigma asked her leader to review a set of assessment data from each of the different ability level classes. After this review, Sigma’s leader discussed with Sigma her “strengths” and “growths” as observed in the reading lesson:

One of my growths was I needed to verify when I taught a standard that the students obtained mastery of that standard before progressing to another. I was trying to hard to keep the different classes on the same pace. She was telling me my growths were beneficial to the students and myself.

Iota’s leader also reviewed the common assessment that Iota and her grade level science teachers created and ways to encourage student improvement. Iota shared the following about the review made by her leader:

She reviewed the assessment and the results that the students achieved and advised me that I needed to work on how to help benefit my students more. She also showed me some new techniques and ideas that will further the children’s learning.

The discussion of Category 2 focused on how eight of the participants in the study engaged in interactions with their leaders for purposes related to instruction. As a result of

instructional support from their leaders, the participants in the study improved implementation of the instructional programs, learned new instructional strategies, and benefited from creating common assessments. Through these interactions, the teachers and their leader worked toward a common goal of enhancing instruction for students and, ultimately student improvement.

### *Category 3: Receiving Support with Classroom Management*

*Receiving support with classroom management* refers to receiving help from suggestions and strategies offered by the leadership to improve management of time, space, and student behavior. The participants' discussion centered on three recurring sub-categories: (a) *managing time*, (b) *managing space*, and (3) *managing student behavior*. Six of the participants shared experiences in which they had received leader support with classroom management.

#### *Sub-category 1: Managing time.*

*Managing time* refers to the challenges of incorporating instructional time into a schedule that also contains common assessments, planning lessons, weekly grade level meetings, and department meetings. The teachers approached their leaders to learn ways to manage all of the demands on their time.

Beta's leader assisted her in managing the instructional time in her classroom by replacing novel reading time in her classroom with the reading assigned as homework:

Before I came in, I met with my leader, and we sat down, looked at the schedule, and saw things weren't where they should be, and we redesigned the schedule. I had to plan with other teachers so our students were staggering the use of books required to be read so we would each have a full set when we read that book.

As a result of working with her leader, Beta maximized the instructional time by planning reading time as homework so all students had a book.

Soon after the school year began, Eta began to feel overwhelmed by the amount of time spent daily in collecting and grading her students' work, so he went to his leader for some advice on how to manage these classroom procedures more efficiently:

I would say her advice has definitely been an advantage just in the way that I run my classroom in ways of how to collect and grade papers in a timely manner. She's really helped me with those types of procedures or drills on how to do things in a quick, efficient manner.

This advice enabled Eta to minimize the amount of time spent daily on collecting and grading his students' work and proved "helpful" in allowing Eta to provide his students with graded feedback in a timelier manner.

*Sub-category 2: Managing space.*

*Managing space* refers to the challenge of designing a classroom to incorporate areas for individual as well as group activities. Essential to success in managing space is an understanding of student movement patterns throughout the classroom and the incorporation of architectural features such as doors and windows into the design arrangement of the classroom.

The management of classroom space prompted Rho to seek his leader's advice when he wanted to arrange his classroom in a manner that would make room for areas for learning centers and collaborative activities. Working with his leader, Rho designed a room that provided space for both the learning centers as well as the collaborative activities. Rho shared how his leader provided assistance in helping him manage the space in his classroom: "Classroom setup was a big one. I have had to experiment and come up with ways that work for me. She was very helpful in centers and collaborative atmosphere type situations." Rho credited his leader with assisting him in creating the classroom design that fit perfectly with the types of instructional opportunities she provided for her students.



While Rho was faced with the challenge of maximizing the space when his students were working on different concepts, Iota was faced with the challenge of creating areas with stations for labs. Days before the start of school, Iota learned about lab stations that could progress through at their own rate. Iota went to her leader for support in dealing with this challenge:

At the beginning, just coming into this space that I am in I knew it definitely had to be transformed. She helped me try to build a flow where students could work at stations. Just really transforming different things that she could see, helping me find tables and chairs for my students, and a gathering place to discuss what was learned.

Working together, Iota and her leader managed to create stations where students could investigate science concepts.

*Sub-category 3: Managing student behavior.*

*Managing student behavior* refers to developing strategies to encourage appropriate behavior from all students. Another facet of this sub-category is developing strategies to use when a student chooses to display inappropriate behavior.

When Beta approached her leader with her concerns about one particular student who was causing disruption in her classroom, her leader led her through an analysis of the behavior intervention strategies Beta was using and helped her discern why they were not solving the problem: “She said to me, ‘What are you doing?’ After I’d told her what I was doing to try to deal with his behavior, she asked me, ‘Why do you think this isn’t working?’” Then, as Beta said, they would analyze the strategies being used and discuss alternative behavior intervention strategies. Beta would leave the discussion with several new strategies to try with this student.

Like Beta, Iota had concerns about a behavior issue with one of her students, so her leader offered to come into her classroom and observe how Iota interacted with the student:

Last year, I had a lot of behavioral issues in my classroom, and some of them I wasn’t sure how to deal with, so she helped me a lot in that area. For instance, one time she came in and just observed just to see how the kids were reacting as a whole. The issue is what I

would do in that instance to work with the kids and try to keep it managed in the classroom but keep on task with everybody else and not be too distracting. She came in and just gave me tips and pointers and helped me with giving a small little incentive chart for that one person that no one else would know about and having a small reward for them to keep them on task and do what they need to do so that they are not disrupting all the other children.

Iota's leader helped her recognize that an essential component of managing classroom behavior was being able to create and implement an individual behavior incentive plan for those students requiring additional assistance in maintaining appropriate behavior.

Like Iota, Alpha approached her leader for assistance in managing the behavior of two students. She described her class as "a wonderful class, except for two students." Alpha's leader assisted her in developing strategies to encourage appropriate behavior from these students:

She helped me to place them in a seating arrangement in which they would not be close to each other. I also had several parent conferences with these children and let the parents know. My leader suggested that I make sure that they understood that their academic progress was due mainly to their behavior and not that they couldn't do it.

Early in the school year, Rho's leader observed the procedures and practices Rho was implementing to assist in the management of student behavior. She felt that Rho's approaches should work successfully and encouraged Rho by saying, "you seem to be doing everything. Just continue to do that and keep your consistency. Maybe in a few weeks or even in a week or two they will conform to what you're trying to do." Rho learned from her leader's feedback the importance of consistency and that sometimes "you have to give things time to work" when implementing new procedures and practices with her students.

When Sigma experienced consistent problems in managing the behavior of one of her students, she made a referral to her school's Student Support Team. Prior to the SST meeting, Sigma's leader advised Sigma to document the student's behavior with a behavior log, which she recorded on her computer. The behavior log included the date of the behavior, described the

student's behavior, and noted what Sigma did in response to the behavior and how the student reacted to Sigma's response. The purpose of the data in the log was to assist Sigma and her leader in analyzing the student's behavior and exploring options for managing the behavior:

I started doing that, and sure enough, in the SST meeting, her leader said, "It's good you have been documenting this child's behavior." At first, when she suggested I document his behavior, I would have never thought to document what I did in response to the behavior and what the child did in response to my consequence. I did not think to do that, but that played a big role in helping with the SST and determining how we could help manage this student's behavior.

Sigma learned from this experience the importance of maintaining current and accurate documentation when observing student behavior. Had Sigma not maintained current and accurate behavior documentation, she realized, "it would have been just me saying I remember this one time, and then there was another time."

Category 3 focused on ways in which the leaders assisted the teachers in creating strategies to manage the demands of time and space. The leaders also provided the teachers with strategies designed for managing student behavior and for dealing with inappropriate behavior.

Theme 2 addressed how the leaders interacted with the teachers in providing support with the standards and instruction as well as support with classroom management and parent communication. The relationships that had developed between the participants and their leaders provided the foundation for these interactions to occur.

### *Theme 3: Outcomes*

*Theme 3: Outcomes* is a broad conceptual theme that addresses the participants' perspectives on the outcomes of the relationship they shared with their leader. The participants described many outcomes of their relationships and interactions with their leaders. These outcomes of leader-initiated programs provide evidence of what nine of the participants found to be most significant. Through their conversation, five categories emerged: (a) *teacher morale*, (b)

*changes in classroom instruction, (c) improved conflict resolution management, and (d) dealing with common assessments, and (e) experiencing growth standards based instruction.* Each of these areas is discussed in detail using the words of the teachers.

*Category 1: Teacher Morale*

*Teacher morale* was an outcome of many meetings, change initiatives, and implementing standards. Five of participants shared experiences in which they became frustrated and had interactions with their leader about their concerns

Alpha described her leader as cold. Although her leader would listen to her she felt little was done about her concerns. Alpha stated “I could always come to her or other leaders about my stress levels but there was little support.”

Business like was how Kappa described the interaction provided by her leader: “She was always ready with a quick response about how research supports the changes or that it was county policy. However it was known from discussions with teachers at the other schools that they were not doing the same things.” The program Kappa referred to in this statement was the backward design program that Kappa had experienced problems in implementing. Kappa shared that after hearing her leader make this comment, he needed additional support from other teachers who were initiating the program.

When Beta’s grade level was experiencing some problems working together, she felt unable to talk with them about some of her concerns she had about the standards and some of her students. Her leader had heard about the grade-level problems and reassured Beta she would always be available. Beta shared how this assurance made her feel:

I didn’t feel left out anymore. I felt like I had an outlet instead of it weighing down on me and me getting miserable about something. So I didn’t feel like I really got weighted down like last year because I could always go to her and talk to her about things.”

When several of Sigma's mathematics students were experiencing some major problems in basic skills, she turned to her leader for guidance:

I had several students who had not mastered skills that were taught in elementary school. They had no automaticity of skills in adding, subtracting, and multiplying. We had to come up with a way to implement ways of incorporating support for this concern. She allowed for us to purchase a series of support material called Mad Minute. Many teachers used this resource to support student learning.

Sigma felt relieved knowing she was not the only teacher experiencing these problems. Sigma shared that later that year, the students gained the skills needed to be more proficient in mathematics.

Category 1 focused on ways in which the support of the leader had an impact on the morale of the teacher. This support was provided in a variety of situations and had a mixed of outcomes of the interactions between the teacher and their leader. The leaders choose various methods to address teacher concerns that had different impacts on morale.

#### *Category 2: Changes in Classroom Instruction*

*Changes in classroom instruction* refers to the way that working with leaders helped them change the instruction they provided to their students in a number of ways. Through discussions of their interactions with their leaders, three sub-categories emerged: (a) *learning to plan with backward design*, and (b) *implementing standards more effectively*.

##### *Sub-category 1: Learning to plan with backward design*

*Learning to plan with backward design* was an outcome that several participants believed had resulted from their interactions with their leader. As a result of this outcome, the participants had a different method of planning instructional opportunities for their students.

When Gamma felt uncertain about the way her leader wanted her to be planning instruction for her students, she sought advice from her leader. Her leader carefully listened to

Gamma's concerns and then provided Gamma with the reassurance she needed to plan effective instruction for her students. Gamma said,

I am one of those people that I want to make sure that I am doing the right thing, and I would just need more or less reassurance that I was going down the right path in planning instruction for my kids.

This reassurance provided by her leader affirmed Gamma in her ability to plan effective instruction. It also allowed her to move forward confidently in planning future effective instructional opportunities for her students.

Sigma was another teacher who had sought reassurance from her leader in planning instruction for her students. When Sigma received materials for the mathematics program she was to use with her students, she noticed there were four instructional manuals. Feeling somewhat overwhelmed, she approached her leader and asked for guidance in structuring and planning mathematics lessons for her students:

There were four manuals last year to the mathematics program. I wasn't exactly sure how to structure it. I knew what to do, but I didn't know how to pace the program. There are going to be three benchmark common assessments that all teachers would administer to all students throughout the county at the same time. I had to be sure I covered the right standards for those benchmarks. She would tell me to try something to see if it fit my needs and get county expectations. It was helpful.

Sigma's leader, had not been a mathematics teacher, but she responded by sharing with Sigma lesson plans used by other teachers. Once Sigma had the opportunity to observe how her fellow teachers had planned mathematics instruction, she felt confident in using their plans as a model for managing and planning mathematics instruction for her own students.

*Sub-category 2: Implementing standards more effectively.*

*Implementing standards more effectively* refers to how teachers felt they had to change their classroom instruction through better implementation of the instructional programs. This

outcome was achieved as a result of earlier interactions when the leader had provided instructional changes to the teacher.

Eta did not particularly like the backward design program used by his school for foreign language instruction to all students. When he shared his feelings with his leader, his leader provided him with some professional advice:

I am not real fond of the backward design program being used with the higher kids. I like the idea of using it with the lower kids but feel the higher kids might find it to be boring. My leader advised me by saying; “You have to stay positive about it, even though you’re in a rut sometimes.” She would just tell me to stay positive because how you act about the program is going to reflect on them.

It was through this advice to “stay positive” that Eta learned a very important lesson about implementing instructional programs with students. As Eta said, “I never really thought about how much my attitude toward the program impacted my students’ attitudes. It really does filter down to them, doesn’t it?”

Iota had several conversations with her leader about how to implement and maintain the pace of the science program with her students effectively. While she felt the pressure to adhere to the guidelines set forth by the backward design program, she also experienced concern when her students were unable to grasp the material being taught. As a result, Iota reached the following conclusion:

I decided it was more important that my students understand the science concepts instead of just rushing through something and hurrying or pressing forward if I really needed to stay on one topic in science. If I need to do part of the science concepts one day and then the next day do the other half that is fine. Just don’t rush through something so that your kids are falling behind when you are thinking you’re still moving ahead with them.

Supported by their leaders, teachers in the study found that they were able to provide better instruction for their students. The teachers were also inspired to think of additional ways to reach their students through new instructional strategies and ideas.

Category 2 focused on methods employed by the beginning teacher to improve classroom instruction. Through their interactions with their leaders, the teachers successfully learned ways to plan instructional opportunities for their students, felt confident experimenting with new ideas, and were capable of implementing programs more effectively.

### *Category 3 Dealing with leadership programs*

*Category 3: Dealing with leadership Programs* was identified as a main theme of the participant's experiences in their leader initiatives. Teachers felt confident in planning and implementing instruction, interacting with their peers, and managing their classrooms. However the implications of all the changes desired by the leaders was a daunting task.

#### *Sub-category 1: Lack of Time.*

The idea of backward design, common assessments, and planning as a grade level, planning as a department and planning by subject as a grade level was complicated enough but time to implement all these initiatives was even harder. As Gamma explained:

We meet and we meet and meet but we get very little time to implement. They spend all the time telling us what it is and how its going to be wonderful but they spend four hours of our four hour work day telling us that. There is no guided practice; they spend the entire time meeting. If they would let us work, do one of these, come back, and let's talk about it. We're supposed do all that on our own time.

The teachers in this study felt confident designing and implementing learning opportunities for their students. They acknowledged areas of need for their students and sought resources in those areas. Beta shared that her leader's words of advice did not help her design the lessons that were required by the changes. Beta continued by saying, "It is just the experience of constantly determining and locating what's going to work with your students."

According to Alpha, "If you feel more confident with what you are doing and that you are doing



the right thing, then you feel better about your teaching.” Gamma said “There is not enough time but you have to implement, I’m not sure we get the best quality that.”

*Sub-category 2: Changes for Improvement*

The changes required by leadership were implemented because as Theta said “They come in looking for that.” Teachers stated that they may not have agreed with the changes but it was a requirement to their jobs. Gamma went on to say “Is the quality there? I think if we really had processed the change, and internalized it would have been something really good for teachers and students.”

The teachers in this study felt the leadership implemented many changes for student improvement. Teachers believed the changes were guided by the needs of students. Time allowed for these changes continued to an issue throughout the study. Several teachers felt the leaders did not take their concerns seriously. Alpha said she was treated like the “low man on the totem pole who doesn’t know what you’re doing.” The expertise and experience of teachers was being ignored.

According to this study, teachers felt more implementing changes did benefit the students and they did improve. Iota observed that she was more prepared and organized when preparing for the new school year. She had implemented some of the strategies in science lessons learned from her leader. Organization and time management are other areas in which she felt she was building from last year’s experience. Iota commented, “I have noticed a lot of things we did last year have really come alive this year and I am really trying to make them work and keep working on them.”

Chapter 4 has presented the findings of this study. Three major themes and eight categories, which represent the recurring ideas in the teachers’ perspectives on their leader

initiated programs in rural north Georgia, were defined, described, and illustrated. In the next chapter, the research is summarized, the findings are discussed, and the implications of the research are set forth.

## CHAPTER 5

### *SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS*

This study explored the perspectives of 10 teachers' on how the principal's instructional leadership affects change directed at student improvement in middle school. In this chapter, the research study is summarized; the findings are discussed; and the implications for future research, for practitioners, and for institutions of higher education are presented.

#### Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine teachers' perspectives on how the principal's instructional leadership affects change directed at student improvement and to propose theoretical ideas, grounded in the data, to explain their perspectives. The research was guided by two research questions: (a) Has the principal made effort to implement change in instruction? and (b) Have the changes increased the school effectiveness in student achievement? This study was conducted in a middle school in a rural North Georgia county where change programs were initiated by leadership and these changes were both promoted and facilitated by the leaders.

The research design used in the study was grounded theory. In accordance with grounded theory methodology, theoretical sampling was used to select the participants, and in-depth, face-to-face interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 participants during the spring and summer of 2008. Constant comparative analysis was used to collect, code, and analyze the data, which included interview responses and researcher's memos. Recurring ideas in participants' responses were identified and organized into three main themes and seven

categories, and theoretical meta-themes grounded in the data emerged from on-going analysis and interpretation of the data.

The results of this study suggest that teachers form relationships with their leaders based on accessibility of the leader and personal and emotional support from the leaders. Teachers and leaders take initiative in forming these relationships. This study also revealed that teachers interact with leaders in a variety of ways. These interactions include curriculum support, instructional support, classroom management support, and change implementation support. The data in this study demonstrated those teachers' relationships and interactions with leaders result in several outcomes. These shared outcomes included changes in teacher morale, improvements teacher instruction, and curriculum pacing and implementation. Teachers also identified several challenges in the instructional leadership.

## Discussion

The findings of this study were presented in Chapter 4. The purpose of this section is to present a thorough discussion of the major findings from this study, specifically how these findings are significant in relation to existing literature on teachers' experiences in the principal's instruction leadership to bring about change. In the second section, the theoretical ideas that emerged from the findings are discussed in relation to the relevant literature.

### *Discussion of Teachers' perspective on principal's instructional leadership*

In a time when change and high stakes testing is mandated the need for student improvement, an in-depth study of teachers' experiences in their respective leadership change efforts in rural middle schools is important. This study shows that, under the umbrella of their respective leadership, the participating teachers formed relationships with their leaders through interactions. These relationships resulted from experiences shared with the leader and were often

supportive, and somewhat guiding. These findings are consistent with the literature that emphasizes the importance of relationships, interactions and instructional leadership. Lapman and Hoeh (1974) wrote, “ *leadership* is not simply a matter of group control, but the initiation of a new structure or procedure for accomplishing an organization’s goals and objectives.”

This study demonstrated that accessibility of the leader enhanced the relationship between the teacher and the leader. When leaders were accessible, teachers sought assistance from their leaders more frequently and more openly. These findings are consistent with Marzano, (2000); Sergiovanni, (1997) view that leadership is directly related to the initiation of change to meet school goals and objectives.

Consistent with the literature Sheppard (1996) synthesized findings on instructional leadership and reported a positive relationship between effective instructional leadership of principals and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and creativity, this study found that personal and curriculum support provided the teachers by their leader was an important part of the relationship. This personal and curriculum support included positive encouragement and strengthened the relationship between the teachers and their leaders. The formation of these relationships provided the foundation for interactions to take place.

This study found that the teachers shared many interactions with their leaders; through these interactions, information, ideas, and opinions were exchanged in a wide array of areas. Leaders in this study interacted with the teachers by assisting them in their understanding and implementation of the performance standards guiding the curriculum. This finding is consistent with the literature that emphasizes the importance of leaders partnering with teachers to achieve results through others as the essence of leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

This study also found that the teachers received instructional support from their leaders, including learning new ways to teach their students and new ways to implement instructional programs. A good leader involves others in the organization when deciding what changes are needed and in determining a method for initiating those changes based on the needs of the school (Blase & Blase, 1998). Generally speaking, a school leader is a principal who has knowledge of the ways in which a school and its district envision the needs of that school.

Another finding of this study was that teachers received support for implementing changes bought about by the leadership's request and Georgia Performance standards. According to Edmonds (1979), the principal's instructional leadership was essential to school effectiveness. Phillips (2004) noted that:

“Among Edmonds' findings were other instructional dimensions credited to the principal and linked to effectiveness: high expectations, an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, an emphasis on acquisition of basic skills, and methods for frequent monitoring of student and teacher progress” (p. 8).

Teachers in this study received support from their leaders in dealing with changes bought about by the Georgia Performance Standards in regards to implementation and pacing. The support provided included help from peers through subject grade level meetings that involved organizing standards and pacing. Hallinger and Heck (1996) concluded that “principal leadership can make a difference in student learning” (p. 37) and that “principal leadership that makes a difference is aimed toward influencing internal school processes that are directly linked to student learning” (p. 38).

This study found that the teachers experienced changes in morale because of the experiences and interactions they shared with their leader. Although the change was varied throughout the staff overall the students did improve.

Teachers revealed that working with leaders helped them improve the instruction they provided to their students in a number of ways. Through interactions with their leaders, teachers gained insight into curriculum and the standards being implemented. The effectiveness of these interactions was supported by the literature where principals who strive to be instructional leaders and who want enduring change in their schools must take a community building approach (Sergiovanni, 1998). Community building requires leadership that promotes effective schools as described by Marzano et al. (2000) and instructional leadership practices.

Two challenges to the success of leadership programs were revealed in this study. Limited access to the leader because of inadequate time and lack of proximity was one of those challenges. Martin and Willhower (1991) warned that administrators need to build into the school schedule regular times for classroom visitation. They found leaders spend only 9% of their time in classrooms. Firestone and Wilson (1989) stated, “With regard to the question of what principals can do to contribute to student achievement, this study reinforces the view that principals contribute most by supporting teachers’ efforts and giving them autonomy.” Ebert and Stone (1988) looked at how strongly principals feel about instruction, whether they communicate their ideas concerning instruction, and to what extent they assume responsibility for instruction.

#### *Discussion of Meta-Themes*

Five meta-themes emerged from the data collected in this study. In this section, these meta-themes are presented and discussed in relation to relevant research on leadership support, implementing change, and teacher challenges, administrator’s level of involvement with the standards implementation, and lack of time.

First, as the results of the study indicate, *when teachers are given support in implementing curriculum and instructional support, student achievement is enhanced.* Results of

this study show that leaders supported teachers in their implementation of the curriculum. Research by Firestone and Wilson (1989) also supported the idea that teachers contribute the most when they are given support of their principal to implement practices deemed best for student achievement. Teachers in this study desired to improve their instruction in science and mathematics to enhance the improvement of their students and sought support from their leaders to accomplish this goal. Teachers also wanted to learn how to implement the performance based standards curriculum better to maximize its potential to improve their students' abilities. Finally, teachers sought alternate methods of instruction to reach those students who were struggling with traditional methods.

Second, *when leaders make themselves accessible to teachers, the teachers are more likely to reach out to their leader for advice and support.* This study demonstrated the importance of leader availability to the teacher on a frequent basis. After reviewing empirical literature on the dual role of the principal as leader and hierarchal player in school effectiveness, Hallinger and Heck (1996) concluded that “principal leadership can make a difference in student learning” (p. 37) and that “principal leadership that makes a difference is aimed toward influencing internal school processes that are directly linked to student learning” (p. 38). They concluded that their discovery of the indirect effects of principal leadership on school achievement verifies that “achieving results through others is the essence of leadership” (p. 39). William’s (2001) results suggested that principals who demonstrate strong feelings about the importance of instruction tend to lead their schools to the most gains.

Leaders of teachers in the present study made frequent visits to the teachers’ classrooms to answer questions, offer advice, and provide materials. In addition to visits to the teachers’



classrooms, leaders also consulted with the teachers on materials they needed, offering guidance to subject chairs at the school and system level.

Third, *when teachers are involved in the decision making process of changes and curriculum implementation they feel ownership*. Pajak (1989) stated an “instructional program improvement, and collaborative work on planning and change, and motivation and organization focused on the shared vision” are highly important to teachers and student improvement. In this study, teachers viewed their leaders as a means of support. Leaders provided positive encouragement and caring for the teachers and invested time and energy in nurturing the relationships with the teachers. Leaders also maintained confidentiality, which afforded the teachers the freedom to share their concerns, frustrations, and anger with their leaders. The first year of implementation is especially stressful due to the effort required to plan every lesson, teach with unfamiliar materials, and, often, teach at an unfamiliar grade level. Leaders can serve as a sounding board and assure teachers that their experience is not unusual and to keep the correct perspective, and provide advice to help reduce the inevitable stress. While such support does little to improve teaching performance directly, it improves the likelihood that teachers will continually strive in the teaching to become effective practitioners.

Fourth, the study reveals that *when leaders offer a myriad of ways to offer change to improving students there is a disconnect between teachers and leaders*. Edmonds (1979) and Brookover and Lezotte (1979) their research, which identified positive characteristics allegedly associated with student achievement in schools found to be effective, indicated that the principal’s strong instructional leadership was essential to school effectiveness. Among Edmonds’ findings were other instructional dimensions credited to the principal and linked to effectiveness: high expectations, an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, an emphasis on

acquisition of basic skills, and methods for frequent monitoring of student and teacher progress. Leaders also visited the teachers' classrooms to observe how the teacher demonstrated the changes requested by the leaders. The leaders were looking for teachers who explained the standards to the students. Leaders wanted to see teachers' who taught and learned whether the students were aware of the standards. Following the visit, notes from the observation were shared with the teacher, and the leader worked with the teacher to analyze the impact the interactions had on the student's understandings. Leaders helped teachers create and implement an individual incentive plan for those students requiring additional assistance in maintaining standards based learning.

Fifth, the findings from the study indicate that *changes were not consistently adhered and little time was afforded implementation*. A major goal of administrators and veteran teachers should be to help teachers entering the school understand goals and staff development that was previously completed with teachers. This study found that administrators had limited involvement in keeping teachers apprised of previous staff development or explaining how this development carried over from year to year. Research has indicated this is important for the instructional leadership to include commitment to a vision and mission (Firestone & Wilson, 1989; Krug, 1992; Persell & Cookson, 1982; Rutherford, 1985; Smith & Andrews, 1989), communication of that vision and mission (Krug, 1992; Smith & Andrews, 1989), high expectations (Krug, 1993; Persell & Cookson, 1982), and monitoring student progress (Krug, 1993; Persell & Cookson, 1982; Rutherford, 1985). Sheppard (1996) synthesized findings on instructional leadership and reports a positive relationship between effective instructional leadership of principals and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and creativity. He also noted that the most effective instructional leadership behavior of principals at the

elementary and high school levels is promoting the professional development of teachers.

Teachers is this study found that the leaders often renamed a program without advising teachers and/or expected teachers to be aware of staff development that occurred prior to their entry into the school. This was a point of frustration for many teachers

Summarizing, the findings of this study may contribute to the body of existing literature on teacher perspectives on administrators being instructional leaders in rural middle schools, and student improvement. Most notably,

1. This study was different from previous studies of teacher perspectives on instructional leadership because it focused on the experiences in middle school and provided an in-depth look at the teachers' responses to change implemented by the administration as instructional leaders.
2. This study found that through their interactions, the relationships that developed between the teacher and their leaders were of a closer, more personal nature than relationships described in other principal as instructional leader studies.

In conclusion, the data from this study indicate that the experiences of the teachers in their instructional leadership programs in the rural north Georgia County facilitated a stressful change and implementation of standards. Interactions with leadership led to supportive interactions, which provided the means for positive outcomes and the strength to overcome the challenges identified by the teachers. However teachers did report frustration over staff development and whether it had a clearly defined purpose for the enhancement of student improvement. Teachers also reported frustration in the fact when students improve the administration is praised but when the students do not improve the teachers are blamed. Therefore little credit is afforded to teachers for student improvement.

## Implications

In this section, the implications of the findings of this study are discussed. Implications for further research are followed by implications for practitioners and implications for colleges and universities.

### *Implications for Further Research*

The purpose of this study was to investigate perspectives on how the principal's instructional leadership affects change. The instruction leadership program at Zeta Middle School was effective in providing support for teachers and affecting student improvement in positive ways.

In the current era of educational reform, further in-depth study of effective instructional leadership and of the strategies used in these programs is warranted for two reasons. First, the *No Child Left Behind Act* makes the effectiveness of instruction a major concern for every school in the nation. This study has established that the leadership practices associated with the relationship between the teacher and their leader improved the effectiveness of classroom instruction, suggesting that further study of leadership practices might be a worthy pursuit. Second, this study has demonstrated that the leadership relationship added an additional level of support for teachers, enabling them to reach new levels of self-confidence. This finding supports the need for further study of instructional leadership programs and relationships, especially with the current focus on nationwide testing and student improvement. Therefore, in-depth studies of instructional leadership provided by the administrators and relationships in high schools, and middle schools might be fruitful, as would comparative studies at each school level and across schools.

Additional studies of instruction leadership programs in rural areas at the high school, middle school, and elementary school levels could possibly be beneficial. These studies would add to the small database of information about teachers' growth in understanding standard based implementation in rural schools. With current trends of high stake testing, performance standards, and highly qualified teachers in the areas of mathematics, science, and special education at critical levels leaders must work with teachers on change and keep them in education by reducing stress levels.

The teachers in this study indicated several ways students benefited from the instructional leadership: 1) Teachers mentioned that students received better instruction and achieved some academic gains. 2) Teachers were advised to reflect upon their own established teaching practices and find new ways to implement performance standards. A goal of additional research might be to investigate the following questions: 1) Do the students of teachers in change performance standard programs make greater student improvement gains. 2) Do the students of teachers not involved in these programs have fewer gains in improvement? 3) Does standards based instruction implemented by principals as instructional leaders increase student achievement?

Research studies have just started to surface that have studied middle school changes by the instructional leadership and its correlation to student improvement. Additional longitudinal research involving middle school changes related to standards based curriculum instruction has had some research. Research into the total involvement of instructional leadership including support by veteran teachers and system personnel would be welcomed.

*Implications for K-12 Instructional Leadership Programs*

Teachers in this study found that the principal as instructional leader was not the only instructional leader. Although the principal established times for staff development, curriculum pacing, and standards unpacking, they often were not the only facilitator. Unpacking is a process provided by the administrators who have already been briefed on the standards to introduce them to the teachers. Teachers noticed veteran teachers, school department chairs, system subject chairs, and other professionals facilitating the meetings. The addition of these facilitators expanded the resources teachers could use for student improvement

Schools implementing the myriad of changes involved in the middle school where this study was conducted should rely on all available resources to implement change. This study revealed the principal is not the only instructional leader nor should she be. As schools become more departmentalized based on grade level and subjects taught the principal rarely has the in depth knowledge of all subjects. The school system needs to provide these experts in each subject. Another resource that came into focus in this middle school study was utilizing the high school teachers who are considered experts or are department chairs in their schools. The staff development led by these groups was highly beneficial to the teachers.

This study revealed that when administrators are not fully supportive of the teachers when implementing change, the quality may be diminished. When establishing the principal as instructional leader, the role of the administrator should be clearly defined with well-established expectations for how the administrator can provide this much-needed support. The administrator as instructional leader needs to be cognitively aware and kept advised on where teachers are in their understanding of current and previous staff development.

Differentiated staff development based who had previous staff development and who has not was desired by the school teachers in this study. This would add to the capacity of teachers

and the building as a whole. This could build on the depth of the knowledge available at each school. In this study although the instructional leaders often told teachers to develop plans that would include differentiated instruction in their classrooms it was not what the instructional leaders provided to the teachers.

### *Implications for Colleges and Universities*

First, institutions of higher learning might collaborate with K-12 schools to develop several methods implementing performance standards to teachers. Although the types of partnerships that could be developed would depend largely on the school's proximity to a university education program, not all collaborations would require that schools and colleges be located in the same proximity. Videoconferencing, email, and Internet software could be used to facilitate communication with college faculty members and other participating schools. Joint efforts to support new teachers would include school leaders and education professors working together to develop mentoring and induction programs. College faculty members could be available to problem solve and discuss concerns with teachers about methods for effective teaching. The University System of Georgia has many resources available to schools that are not commonly known. One such facility is The Center for Education Integrating Science, Mathematics, and Computing (CEISMC) is located on the Georgia Tech campus. Schools in rural areas could hold these workshops online or through videoconferencing.

Second, graduate programs in education should emphasize coursework that provides courses related to curriculum development and pacing. The course outline should include a review of the research on teachers implementing standards based curriculum implementation, the creation of a searchable digital resource with information about the school and community, and

the opportunity to work with those in the area that have experience. In addition, the course work could include discussions about how to initiate and maintain good relationships with teachers and provide the opportunity to become familiar with and be able to explain to a teacher the components of the Georgia Performance Standards.

This chapter has provided a summary of the study and a discussion of the findings as they relate to relevant literature. Implications of the study's findings for further research, for K-12 principal as instructional leaders, and for colleges and universities were presented and discussed. Perhaps the most effective way to conclude this study is to reiterate that based on research presented and to follow the terms effective school is sinuously connected with effective principals who are by definition effective instructional leaders who have the goal of placing improvement in student improvement at the forefront.



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