PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE ISSUES AND BARRIERS

OF WORKING WITH MARGINAL TEACHERS

by

KELLY KATHERINE NAGLE CAUSEY

(Under the direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of five elementary principals related to the issues and barriers they have encountered when working with marginal teachers. Moreover, this study sought to determine the perspectives that elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers, the issues and barriers elementary principals experience within their own buildings and as they worked with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching, and the types of supports that elementary principals received from central office personnel when working with marginal teachers. An open-ended, inductive qualitative approach was used to gain the perspectives of five elementary principals from one large, urban school system in the state of Georgia. The interview questions were semi-structured.

The greatest barrier the principals encountered in working with marginal teachers was the difficulty in getting the marginal teachers themselves to admit and understand the problems they were experiencing. The greatest concern of the principals' was the impact on the students and the suffering that the students endured at the hands of marginal teachers. The personal toll on the principals was significant as they worked with marginal teachers. The data showed that the principals perceived their greatest support from central office personnel to actually be the

building level coaches that had been trained by and were supported by the central office. The

principals' responses indicated that their greatest need in the way of support from central office

personnel was the development of a more specific protocol to follow when working with

marginal teachers. Due to the highly sensitive and confidential nature of the topic, many of the

responses the principals provided were contradictory. In addition, the principals had difficulty

articulating the differences between marginal and incompetent teachers.

INDEX WORDS: Marginal teachers, Issues and barriers working with marginal teachers, Marginal teacher performance, Legal issues and marginal teachers, Moral and ethical issues and marginal teachers, Incompetent teachers, Principals and marginal teachers, Principals and incompetent teachers

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KELLY KATHERINE NAGLE CAUSEY

B.A. Saint Mary's College, 1993

M.Ed. Georgia College & State University, 1999

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KELLY KATHERINE NAGLE CAUSEY

Major Professor: Sally J. Zepeda

Committee: John P. Dayton
                     Juanita Johnson-Bailey

Electronic Version Approve d:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, who has grown with me as I have worked through this process. It is still amazing to me that since I began this doctoral journey, I have also managed to find my wonderful husband, get married, become a principal, and give birth to twins! Brian, thank you for encouraging and challenging me to complete this journey and for helping me keep my sense of humor. You are my partner and my best friend and I love you. The surprising gift of John Henry and Katherine in the midst of this process has been the greatest one of my life, and it is for them that I complete this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There is no question that all communities want "quality" teachers, schools, and school

systems to educate their children. The desire for highly-qualified teachers is universal; however,

defining and supporting that desire and demand for "quality" is highly subjective. What is not

subjective is that throughout the educational community it is agreed that "the quality of a school

system rests on the quality of its teachers" (McKinsey & Company, 2007, p. 16). In a 2007 study

by McKinsey and Company about the world's top performing school systems, the basic premise

about quality outcomes for any school system is that the quality of the system is "essentially the

sum of the quality of the instruction its teachers deliver" (p. 26). In addition to requiring

"quality" of its teachers, American society seems to demand even more. As early as the 1970s,

Fleming (1978) addressed the issue of the quality of teachers and contended:

> American society has evidenced a firm conception of the teacher's role. Indeed, it has
> been a consistently held conviction that the care of the young is as much a moral as an
> educational responsibility and, in this regard, teachers have been expected to function as
> exemplars in their professional and private lives. The educational history of the United
> States is replete with examples of stringent ordinances establishing high standards of
> conduct for those in charge of children. Since the formation of good character and
> citizenship have been historically the dominant goals of the schools, it has been a natural
> consequence to require moral excellence in those who staff them. In return for upholding
> the public trust, teachers have been accorded a singular and unquestionable status.
> (p. 423)

However, it is difficult to define what a "quality" teacher is, as "there is no canon for educators.

There is some agreement of what teachers should know but no consensus on how to train good

teachers or ensure they have mastered essential skills or knowledge" (Hess, 2002, p. 169).

Moreover, "research on the strong connections between classroom practices and student

academic performance support the importance of quality teachers in all classrooms" (Trimble, Davis, & Clanton, 2003, p. 36). Even without a specific definition, it is usually agreed that the quality of the teacher is of the utmost importance. Unfortunately, difficulty with marginal and incompetent teachers is not a new phenomenon. In 1975, Rosenberger and Plimpton asserted that "the hard-pressed tax-payer" was calling for the dismissal of teachers who were "not getting the job done" (p. 469).

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a project of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), compares the quality of educational outcomes across educational systems throughout the world, and in 2007, PISA released a study through McKinsey and Company, entitled "How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out On Top." In the top 10 performing school systems, the three items that were cited as mattering the most were "(a) getting the right people to become teachers, (b) developing them into effective instructors, and (c) ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child" (p. 2). If "one of the most rapid ways to increase the quality of (the) system was to increase the quality of its teachers" (Webster, 1988, p. 245), an intentional and deliberate plan for improvement and a plan for what to do when there is no improvement must exist, especially for marginal teachers.

So, what is a marginal teacher? What is an incompetent teacher? Although "attempts to define teaching competency have been made over many years" (Rosenberger & Plimpton, 1975, p. 469), there is no one correct or legal definition of the marginal teacher. Bridges (1984) stated:

> A marginal teacher is one who has persistent and/or recurring difficulties in one or more of the following areas: subject matter mastery; instructional competencies; producing desired results; rapport with students, parents, and staff; physical and/or emotional stability in teaching. (p. 66)

Even with this definition, there is room for interpretation. Sweeney and Manatt (1984) gathered

data from more than 750 principals to attempt to create a portrait of a marginal teacher as:

> One who appears to have sufficient command of subject matter but whose lack of
> classroom management skills get in the way of student learning. Put more bluntly, the
> marginal teacher often butchers a lesson, failing to effectively check for understanding,
> use modeling appropriately, or attend to student motivation. (p. 25)

Although this definition appears to include many of the same topics, there are no clear

expectations or competencies included in this and other definitions. Rosenberger and Plimpton

(1975) asserted that incompetent teachers were "considered synonymous with inefficiency,

insufficiency, and inability" (p. 471). According to White and Burke (1993), only two states have

attempted to define incompetence: Alaska and Tennessee. White and Burke asserted that, "the

condition of incompetence lacks the ability to perform in a satisfactory manner" (p. 169).

Even without a standard or legal definition, it is the task of principals to identify and to

assist teachers whose performance does not support student learning. Painter (2000) shared, "The

responsibility for remediating the performance of low performing teachers or removing them

falls on school principals" (p. 369). Henderson-Sparks, Ehrgott, and Sparks (1995) profiled the

overall characteristics of a teacher whose performance is marginal as such:

> When asked to identify the key factors that contributed most to the condition of their
> marginal teachers, principals at all levels cited lack of motivation, burnout, and personal
> crises. They also noted changing student demographics and mismatches of competencies
> in regard to grade level and/or subject matter. The most common forms of marginal
> performance were persistent negative attitudes about teaching and persistent classroom
> control problems. Often the inability to relate and work compatibly with students,
> parents, and co-workers was identified by teachers as a greater problem for marginal
> teachers than their technical competence. (p. 32)

Surely, there are marginal people in every field, so why is the subject of marginal or incompetent

teaching so important? According to Painter (2000):

> Although the proportion of poor teachers might arguably be no higher than the proportion
> of poor workers in other fields, the social effects are considerably greater as these

teachers affect large numbers of children year after year. Thus, the problem is serious because it has widespread effects on a population largely unable to protect itself from the effects of mistreatment. (p. 368)

Why would the social effects of a marginal teacher be "considerably greater?" To add to the importance of the issue of marginal performance, Behling (1966) contended that:

The courts have stated their position so clearly that there can be little doubt about the fact that the judiciary views the role of teachers as one which covers a wider sphere than the classroom. The courts have forcefully demonstrated that one who enters the education profession assumes a responsibility which cannot be taken off like one's coat at the end of the teaching day. In fact, there seems to be no end to the educators' day. Heavy responsibilities for the healthy growth of children and youth are with teachers constantly. The courts have made it quite clear that educators are to be held responsible morning and evening, in school and out. Courts likewise have expected teachers to possess certain traits not commonly required of the general public and to divest themselves of other characteristics which might be tolerated in those in some other professions. (pp. 762-763)

There is no universal definition of marginal teaching, and yet teachers appear to be held to a higher standard than other members of society. But, unless there is a single blatant act which demands the immediate dismissal of a marginal or incompetent teacher, often students and other staff members suffer the effects of that teacher's marginal or incompetent performance for an extended period of time (Tucker, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

One thing that we have in common is that we attended school in one form or another. Statistically, it is more than likely that each of us has experienced, at least once, the instruction of a marginal teacher. According to Tucker (2001), "expert opinion and empirical research indicate that 5 to 15 percent" of the teachers in public schools "perform at incompetent levels" (p. 52). According to Henderson-Sparks et al. (1995), "researchers estimate that from 12 to 15 % of today's classroom teachers function at marginal levels, somewhere between satisfactory and incompetent" (p. 32). Even if we use the conservatively low end of the range and assume that only five percent of the teachers are marginal or incompetent, is there anyone who is willing to

sacrifice their own child to be in that marginal or incompetent teacher's classroom, even for one period per day?

The researcher has purposeful reasons for wanting to do this research. I am a former elementary school principal who worked in an urban system. I took a leave of absence to raise my new twins. My school had "just made" Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for 2007-2008, and each year the school came closer to not making AYP as the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) continued to climb at a rate that far surpassed the increases in the levels of success for my students in subgroups. I have had to work with, assist, coach, counsel, supervise, document, evaluate, and deal with marginal or incompetent teachers, and I have seen the havoc they wreak in a classroom and a school, and on the lives and learning of students. Moreover, I worked in a large urban school system where the topic of discussion was often about teachers who were not working up to standards and about the lack of quality teacher candidates, in general.

If five to 15% (Ehrgott, Henderson-Sparks, & Sparks, 1993; Tucker, 2001) of the teachers in a system are working at a level that is somewhere between marginal and incompetent; the number of children affected is staggering. Let us take a look at a mythical school system that employs 500 teachers. If even just 10% of those 500 are marginal to incompetent, it would mean 50 of the 500 teachers are working in such a way that does not benefit or enhance student learning, and is possibly even detrimental or harmful to students. If the average class size is 25 students, it also means that those 50 marginal or incompetent teachers could affect the lives and learning of at least 1,250 students in just one year. Then take into account how long it takes to remove a marginal or incompetent teacher from the classroom, and the problem in compounded.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of elementary school principals about the issues and barriers that they face when dealing with marginal teachers. The researcher sought to discover what elementary principals think about the work involved in dealing with marginal teachers. I sought also to uncover the specific issues and barriers that elementary principals encounter when dealing with marginal teachers. From such a study, it is hoped to uncover the issues and barriers within the building and with central office personnel that affect the ways in which elementary principals work with a small population of teachers—marginal teachers—found in every school.

Background of the Study

The whole notion of quality and teacher quality has been elevated given the nature of the provisions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and administrators "have increasing responsibility to address ineffective teachers and deal with marginal teachers" (Trimble et al., 2003, p. 36). While the emphasis on quality and accountability is higher than ever, "ensuring that teachers have knowledge and capacity is not easy," because "delivering excellent instruction requires teachers to develop a highly sophisticated set of skills" (McKinsey & Company, 2007, p. 26). Not only is the skill set required of teachers complex and ever-increasing but also the demands on the administrators who supervise teachers are escalating, because "without quality teachers and teaching, not even the best school improvement plan can succeed" (Johnson, Petrie, & Lindauer, 1999, p. 1). However, while the focus on the effectiveness and importance of instructional leadership continues to increase, it is not clear exactly how principals and administrators should proceed with dealing with marginal teachers. Blacklock (2002) states:

> While much of the literature on effective instructional leadership urges principals to confront teacher incompetence, the process is far from easy. Principals must weigh a

number of factors—the emotional cost of confrontation, the investment in time, the possible impact on staff morale, opposition by the teachers' union, and the difficulty in 'winning.' (p. 27)

Administrators must be experts in supervision and have specific plans and resources to assist marginal teachers, as dismissal appears to be rare; "despite conservative estimates that 5 percent of teachers are incompetent, the termination rate—which includes resignations, dismissal of tenured teachers, and nonrenewals of probationary teachers—is less that 1 percent" (Tucker, 2001, p. 52). In *Childers v. Independent School District* (1982), the court held that:

The dismissal of teachers and non-renewal of their teaching contracts is sometimes a complex, difficult process, with serious implications. Because of the fact that under statutory procedures, the dismissal or non-renewal of a teacher requires a long and time consuming effort, school administrators and Boards of Education are often reluctant to institute such procedures against teachers who ought to be dismissed. As a result, the students suffer from the quality of their education. On the other hand, teachers, at times in the past, have not been fairly treated and have been dismissed or non-renewed without good reason. In determining cases involving dismissal or non-renewal of a teacher's contract, the courts are obligated to consider the rights of the teacher, the rights of the School Board, and the rights of the school children to receive a quality education in a proper school atmosphere. (n.p.)

There are many issues to be considered when working with a marginal teacher.

Research Questions

Overall, this study examined the perspectives that elementary school principals offered to frame a better understanding of the issues and barriers they experience when they are dealing with marginal teachers. Specifically, the research questions that guided the study included:

1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?

2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?

3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?

4. What types of supports do elementary principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This open-ended, inductive study used qualitative methods to frame the responses of the principals who were interviewed. After data were collected and then later analyzed, themes were developed. Given the inductive nature of this research, the lack of real studies that have looked at the principal's perspectives related to marginal teachers, and the Highly Qualified Teacher provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, the study is timely and relevant. From a theoretical perspective, the researcher relied on the constructs of constructivism in that she wanted the respondents to share and explicate their understandings of working with marginal teachers and the barriers that were present at both the building level and at the central office level.

Significance of the Study

There is practical significance in this study based on what we can learn about issues and barriers that elementary principals encounter when working with marginal teachers. The existing research and literature appears to have some "recipes" or step-by-step guides (Johnson et al., 1999; Lawrence, Vachon, Leake, & Leake, 1993) for working with and then dismissing teachers, but to date, there is a dearth of research that examines the barriers that impede the work of the principal when dealing with marginal teachers. In addition, with the increased requirements for Highly Qualified Teachers through the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, even more than the estimated five to 15% (Tucker, 2001) of teachers may be at risk of being viewed as marginal or incompetent.

The findings of the study may be beneficial to several groups: elementary principals, secondary principals, central office personnel who work with administrators regarding marginal teachers, central office personnel who work directly with marginal teachers, professional development personnel, human resources personnel, and marginal teachers themselves.

Assumptions of the Study

The researcher made three assumptions at the inception of the study. These assumptions were:

- The participants who were selected would be truthful and honest in their responses to the researcher.

- This research would add in some way by enlarging an understanding of how principals work with marginal teachers.

- The researcher could remain neutral throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting of results.

Definition of Terms

Marginal teacher: A marginal teacher is one who struggles for whatever reason (social, emotional, lack of preparedness, classroom management, interpersonal skills, etc.) to be an effective teacher, but who is willing and able to make adjustments and changes and work, with support, to improve (Bridges, 1984; Bridges, 1986; Henderson-Sparks et al., 1995; Kaye, 2004; Sweeney & Manatt, 1984).

Incompetent teacher: An incompetent teacher is one who is unable to effectively manage a classroom or deliver instruction, and who is unwilling or unable to improve even given the appropriate support, coaching, and guidance (Bridges, 1986; Citron, 1985; Ehrgott et al., 1995; Rosenberger & Plimpton, 1975; Tucker, 1997; White & Burke, 1993).

Barrier: A barrier is a person, policy, procedure, attitude, law, or other entity that an administrator encounters which makes working with marginal teachers difficult.

Limitations of the Study

Although there is value in this study, there are, however, also limitations. This study was limited to elementary school principals from one school system in the state of Georgia. Moreover, given the population from which the researcher could draw participants, the sampling, albeit one of convenience, was limited to five female elementary principals. The final limitation is that the researcher was formerly employed as an elementary school principal in the system in which the study was conducted.

Overview of the Research Procedures

This study was conducted in a large, urban school system in the state of Georgia. This was an open-ended, inductive study with semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A). Five elementary school principals were each interviewed two times, and they were asked questions pertaining to their perspectives about the barriers they found in working with marginal teachers. The researcher recorded the interviews with audio tape and took written notes. Once the data were collected, results were transcribed and reviewed in a timely manner. The data collected from the participants were presented thematically coupled with the overall research questions.

To analyze further, emergent patterns found in the data and coupled to the interview questions were reported. At the conclusion of data collection, transcription, and review, the researcher presented overall themes and patterns in the data. The researcher did not attempt to ground theory, but made an attempt to understand the data related to the following questions:

1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?

2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?

3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with the central office in handling issues related to marginal teaching?

4. What types of supports do elementary principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?

The researcher sought to draw conclusions, implications, and then to make recommendations from the data.

<div align="center">Organization of the Dissertation</div>

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an overview of the study, including the background, theoretical/conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, and research procedures. Chapter 2 is the review of the literature. Chapter 2 includes examination of areas including highly qualified teachers, marginal teaching and teacher performance, incompetent teachers, legal issues and personnel law, and the moral and ethical issues related to working with marginal teachers. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study, including data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 reports the results and findings of the data collected from the participants of the study. Chapter 5 reports the conclusions of the researcher, as well as a summary and discussion of implications and recommendations arising from the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The review of the literature is organized around five major topics. The first section is about highly qualified teachers and accountability. The second section is about marginal teaching. Incompetent teachers are the subject of the third section. The fourth section is about legal issues and personnel law. The final section of the review of the literature is about the moral and ethical issues related to marginal teachers. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?

2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?

3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?

4. What types of supports do elementary principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?

Highly Qualified Teachers/Accountability

In this section of the review of the literature, the importance of education and teachers in society was examined. Additionally, the impact of the Highly Qualified Teacher provision of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is examined. Finally, accountability in schools as it related to principals and supervision of highly qualified teachers is explored.

Neumann (2009) contends that "Everyone agrees that students need highly qualified teachers. The debate over what teachers should know and how they should be prepared continues" (p. 81). Dayton and Recesso (2007) stated, "More than any other element, the quality of the faculty defines the quality of the school and the education it provides to children" (p. 1). Teachers need a professional and supportive culture in which to work, and Zepeda (2006) reminds us that "the most successful schools function within a culture of collaboration and collegiality, and struggling schools must make serious strides to institutionalize a collaborative professional culture within the school" (p. 70). Darling-Hammond, Wise, and Pease (1983) noted "the demand for accountability in education has shifted from broad issues of finance and program management to specific concerns about the quality of classroom teaching and teachers" (p. 285).

Strong educational systems and quality teachers are desired in all societies. It is human nature to want the best opportunities for our children. As Darling-Hammond (2005) stated, "Around the world, the importance of education to individual and societal success has increased at a breathtaking pace as a new knowledge-based economy has emerged" (p. 237). She goes on to explain "many have focused especially on improving teacher education, recognizing that preparing accomplished teachers who can effectively teach a wide array of learners to high standards is essential to economic and political survival" (p. 237).

In the United States, the wish for highly qualified teachers for our students is not only desired but is now legislated: "In the U.S., a growing consensus about the importance of teachers has led to reforms of teacher education, the development of professional teaching standards, and the No Child Left Behind requirement that schools employ only 'highly qualified teachers'" (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 237). However, even legislation does not ensure or guarantee the

qualifications of our teachers; "At least 50,000 individuals enter teaching each year without training, and most of them are assigned to teach the nation's most vulnerable students in the highest-need schools" (p. 238). Darling-Hammond and Berry (2006) noted, "Studies show that well-prepared and well-supported teachers are important for all students, but especially for students who come to school with greater needs" (p. 15). If we are to have reform in our schools, we must have effective, high-quality teachers and, according to Fuhr (1993), "Reform begins in the classroom where effective teaching is taking place" (p. 44).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) "emphasizes teacher quality as a key factor in improving student achievement" (Zepeda, 2006, p. 61). But, according to Darling-Hammond and Berry (2006), "States can now identify teachers as 'highly-qualified' if they simply pass a test and earn a college major in a field 'closely related' to the subjects they want to teach" (p.17). The authors further contend that "we should not label candidates as 'highly qualified' until they have learned to teach and fully met certification requirements," yet "the measures currently used to qualify teachers are largely multiple-choice tests focused on basic skills or subject-matter knowledge. Almost none evaluate actual teaching skills or performance" (p. 17). The requirements of the law are not being applied in practice. According to Darling-Hammond and Berry (2006), although recent research shows that "teachers who undergo traditional preparation and certification produce higher student achievement gains" (p. 16), there is a disconnect in the application of the federal rules, and "the United States Department of Education has encouraged states to redefine certification in ways that eliminate teacher education coursework, student teaching, and 'other bureaucratic hurdles'" (p. 16). There is obviously a disconnect between the intent and the practice related to highly qualified teachers.

Principals are key to maintaining high teacher quality, because they are the people who can influence teacher quality, and thus accountability, through effective supervision practices. Darling-Hammond et al. (1983) contended, "Principals have a stake in maintaining stability in their organizations, allowing them to respond to parental and bureaucratic concerns for accountability, while keeping staff morale intact" (p. 288). Zepeda (2006) stated:

> For supervision to emerge as high stakes practice, it must be done as a means to work *with* teachers *before* they are evaluated for accountability. Supervision is often the road less travelled by administrators. Why is it doubtful that all supervisory roads do not lead to evaluation? First, by matter of legally binding agreements with unions, state statutes, and policies adopted by school boards, typically only evaluation is mandatory. Hence, supervision is conducted only when it is included as part of the overall teacher evaluation procedures, or as a means to document remedial progress contained in a plan of improvement. Unfortunately, supervision is rarely applied as an opportunity to enhance teacher growth and professional learning. (p. 69, emphasis in the original)

Just as our neediest and most at-risk students need our highest quality teachers, our neediest, most at-risk, and most marginal teachers need the best, most supportive, most formative supervision in order to succeed. Unfortunately what they often get instead is compared to a trip to the emergency room. Zepeda (2006) described:

> This type of emergency-based supervision is similar to what injured people brought to a hospital emergency room experience, where all are triaged. Emergency, or deficit supervision, must be replaced with more responsive and empathetic processes that relate more directly to the context of the school, the characteristics of teachers and students, and the culture of the classroom environment. (p. 69)

Supervision will have to be distributed and shared among school-based leadership rather than resting solely on the shoulders of the principal. Relying solely on evaluation will not fix the problem. Zepeda (2006) reminds us that "Supervision practiced as evaluation is a custom that has been embedded as a part of the culture by the US school system. However, this custom can be broken by using, perhaps, the most underutilized resource in the school—teachers" (p. 69). This would seemingly use already highly qualified—and effective—teachers to assist others in

becoming so. The key would appear to be using this distributed supervision early and often rather than waiting until a marginal teacher is indentified. Zepeda (2006) believes, "Supervision predicated on teacher leadership would look quite different, regardless of its form (e.g. peer coaching, action research, portfolio development). Institution of such processes would *change* school structures, namely the structures of power and authority" (p. 69, emphasis in the original).

Marginal Performance

In this section of the review of the literature, marginal teaching is examined, including definitions of marginal teaching and criteria for identifying marginal teachers. This section also examines the process of change for marginal teachers.

Unfortunately, regardless of the requirements of legislation, marginal teachers continue to be a serious problem in our nation's schools. Zepeda (2006) stated, "There is little doubt that a severe problem exists" (p. 61). Kaye agrees that "the issue of marginal teaching appears to be ubiquitous within the field of supervision and evaluation. The dual purposes of accountability and professional development have added to this complexity" (2004, p. 236). However, there is no one definition of what a marginal teacher is. Kaye contends that, "In professional discourse, teachers' minimum application of the explicit knowledge, skills, and attributes considered by educators to constitute acceptable practice is commonly called marginal teaching" (p. 234). Kaye went on to state:

> Marginal teaching was understood to be the level of professional teaching that cannot be documented as 'incompetent' but, rather, borders on incompetence and prompts a supervisor to believe that the teaching needs to change and to improve. Marginal teaching is neither stagnant nor contained within precise boundaries. (p. 234)

However, Ehrgott et al. (1993) found that "lacking firm guidance" regarding the identification of marginal teachers, "site administrators are left to determine their own criteria" (p. 3). Darling-

Hammond et al. (1983) contended that such a specific definition or set of criteria may not be feasible when she stated:

> The imperative of uniform treatment for personnel decisions may result in standardized definitions of acceptable teaching behavior. However, research on teacher performance and teaching effectiveness does not lead to a stable list of measurable teaching behaviors effective in all teaching contexts. (p. 320)

Not only is there not one agreed upon definition of the marginal teacher, but also there is not even an agreed upon set of criteria to be used to identify this type of teacher. Kaye (2004) stated, "Although principals in these studies reported they could recognize marginal teaching, other findings revealed that principals had no explicit set of evaluation criteria for identifying such teaching" (p. 237). Kaye further stated:

> Barriers to supervisory responses to marginal teaching include ownership of change by marginal teachers as evidenced when they deny that assistance is needed and refuse assistance. Teachers told of offering help to marginal teachers that was not accepted. These marginal colleagues, in effect, had removed themselves from their professional communities. (p. 251)

Other teachers also often identify marginal teachers within their own ranks. In Kaye's 2004 study, teachers indicated that often "these marginal teachers and their colleagues reached out with enthusiasm and energy to help one another because they know they, too, had been helped and would be helped again" (p. 253). The teachers did view different types of marginal teachers differently, but "frustration and despair were the emotions most often expressed by teachers" (p. 253) as they discussed the marginal teachers who had essentially given up. Kaye went on to say that the "teachers perceived this form of marginal teaching to constitute an injustice—an unfair outcome of rapidly implemented changes mandated by external standards to verify that teachers were having difficulties" (p. 253). Marginal teachers affect not only the students in their classrooms but the other teachers in the school as well.

Some marginal teachers have difficulty with content knowledge and some have difficulty with classroom management. Some have difficulty with both areas, and often one is related to the other. Torff and Fusco (2007) indicated that the "most common perceived causes of teacher ineffectiveness were three components of pedagogical knowledge: classroom management skills, lesson-implementation skills, and rapport with students" (p. 61). Torff's and Fusco's (2007) contention was that lack of pedagogical knowledge was more serious and of greater concern for the marginal teacher in that:

> It goes without saying that content knowledge is essential to teaching competency. But excessive concern about content-knowledge deficiencies has distracted educators and policy-makers from the more difficult teacher-quality problem in public schools. Research shows that ineffective teaching is most often attributable to deficiencies in pedagogical knowledge. Therefore, high-quality teachers not only should know their stuff, they should also be able to teach it. (p. 62)

Jackson (1997) contended that "marginal teachers many times seem to have no sense of what they are doing wrong or how to remedy problems" (p. 28). Jackson went on to say, "This defensiveness makes it hard for principals to provide a foundation for needed changes or improvements" (p. 28).

To make matters more complicated, "It is one thing to define and measure teacher competence in a standardized fashion; it is quite another to change teacher performance" (Darling-Hammond et al., 1983, p. 288). Ehrgott et al. (1993) found that "Most marginal teachers have become accustomed to receiving satisfactory evaluations in the past" (p. 4). The authors went on to state that "many site administrators have received little training in how to identify the causes of a teacher's poor performance and prescribing appropriate intervention strategies (p. 4). Moreover, "administrators often face a moral dilemma in placing students in these classrooms, especially in the primary grades" (Jackson, 1997, p. 28) because they know the effect it can have

on student learning. Darling-Hammond et al. (1983) describes the requirements of a successful

process in the following way:

> Effectively changing the behavior of another person requires enlisting the cooperation
> and motivation of the person, in addition to providing guidance on the steps needed for
> improvement to occur. At the individual level, change relies on the development of two
> important conditions within the individual: knowledge that a course of action is the
> correct one and a sense of empowerment or efficacy, that is, a perception that pursuing a
> given course of action is both worthwhile and possible. (p. 314)

The process of identifying, working with, and supporting marginal teachers is ultimately a

change process.

Incompetent Teachers

In this section of the review of the literature, incompetent teachers and the difficulty in

dismissing them from their contracts is explored. Information about specific causes and grounds

for dismissal are examined. Finally, the issue of accountability in relation to incompetent

teachers is explored.

Issues with tenure, teachers' unions, and the enormous amount of time and effort

involved all play into the administrators' role in the dismissal of a teacher. Citron (1985) asserts

that:

> All too often administrators seem reluctant to initiate dismissal procedures and instead
> put up with unsatisfactory teachers or transfer them to other schools, while placing the
> blame on the tenure system. Yet, as long as teachers' procedural rights are respected,
> courts are unlikely to deny attempts to fire truly incompetent teachers. (p. 300)

Tenure, however, does not protect teachers from specific cause for dismissal, such as

"immorality, incompetence, insubordination, physical or mental incapacity, neglect of duty, or

other sufficient cause" (Citron, 1985, p. 300). The problem lies in the interpretation and

understanding of these potential causes for dismissal. According to Citron, "educators hesitate to

invoke an abstract reason for dismissal like 'incompetence,' because they are uncertain about its

legal meaning, and that elements such as lack of mastery or inability to impart knowledge to students should be specified in statues" (p. 301). Tucker (1997) stated, "Administrative responses to incompetence among tenured teachers can vary widely depending on the number, nature, and severity of the problems" (p. 111). Ehrgott et al. (1993) contended, "One of the greatest difficulties in working successfully with a marginal teacher is the identification of specific weaknesses and/or problems" (p. 19).

The reasons that warrant the dismissal of a teacher have changed very little during the last 50 years. Single, specific acts can hold sufficient gravity to warrant the dismissal of a teacher. In addition, courts may have to make decisions based on a series of similar acts or repeated acts. In 1966, Behling reported that there were several specific single acts which warrant dismissal of a teacher. These include but are not limited to violation of a written board requirement, disobedience of reasonable orders of the Board of Education (p. 754), improper conduct in contracting for a teacher position (p. 754), violation of an oral order (p.754), violation of a state statute (p. 754), subjecting the health of students to serious peril (p. 755), falsification of an application record (p. 755), presenting oneself as a poor example for children (p. 755), and drunkenness (p. 756).

Furthermore, certain acts when committed repeatedly or a series of acts also may warrant dismissal. Behling (1966) described several examples of these types of situations: refusing on several occasions to permit supervisory personnel in to a classroom (p. 757), repeated refusal to obey an oral order (p. 757), failure to pursue further professional study when directed to do so (p. 758), repeatedly committing acts which violate the intent of a written board regulation (p. 758), repeated and excessive use of corporal punishment (p. 759), repeated acts outside of school

where teachers have "not recognized their exemplar responsibilities" (Behling, 1966, p. 759),

falsifying affidavits (p. 759), and cruelty to children (p. 761).

Single, specific acts or series of acts seem to be more easily identifiable and

documentable than teacher incompetence in the classroom regarding teaching. This is when the

importance of expert evaluation and coaching by an administrator becomes essential, as teachers

must be given an opportunity to remediate deficiencies in teaching (Claxton, 1986, p. 182).

Claxton described the purpose of remediation provisions:

> To identify weaknesses in teachers who are not teaching effectively or efficiently, and
> once identified, permit the teachers a chance to remedy them. If the deficiencies are not
> corrected, then the teacher should be dismissed in the best interests of the students and
> the school. (p. 187)

However, the courts do provide that the conduct actually be remediable before affording this

opportunity to teachers. According to Claxton (1986), "Even when a remediation opportunity is

mandated, teachers are to be afforded an opportunity to correct deficiencies only if such

deficiencies are remediable" (p. 183). The author continued, "Some courts have found that not

all conduct requires a remediation opportunity if it adversely affects teaching effectiveness" (p.

183).

If the conduct or issue is remediable and the teacher is still subsequently dismissed,

certain guidelines must be followed in order for the courts to uphold the dismissal of a teacher by

a school board. Claxton (1986) reported that:

> Generally, if remediation attempts fail, the board's dismissal will be found to be valid if
> the following procedures were implemented. First, the school board must have provided
> timely written notification to the teacher informing them of the board's intent to dismiss
> them unless deficiencies are corrected. Second, the notification must state with specificity
> the reasons for finding an area of deficiency. Third, the teacher must be provided with a
> reasonable time to correct any deficiencies. (p. 188)

Claxton continued to emphasize the importance of assisting the teacher, and shared, "While not always required, a prudent administrator would also provide assistance to the teacher in an effort to remediate any deficiencies" (p. 188).

Teacher quality and accountability, and as a result, teacher dismissal, are significant issues throughout our educational community and society in general. As student accountability continues to be forefront in the minds of the public through the AYP monitoring of NCLB and the move toward 100% of students in all groups and subgroups meeting or exceeding expectations on standardized tests, teachers are also being held to higher standards. Unfortunately, "most site administrators fail to recognize the subtle differences between teachers who are marginal and those who are truly incompetent" (Ehrgott et al., 1993, p. 19). Rosenberger and Plimpton (1975) stated, "Both educators and the courts might agree that a defined acceptable standard of teaching known by all in advance would be the most desirable basis upon which to make competency decisions" (p. 485).

<div align="center">Legal Issues/Personnel Law</div>

This section of the review of the literature reviews the importance of evaluations with regard to the dismissal of incompetent teachers. Difficulties for administrators are examined. Finally, the section provides a review of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated with regard to education and personnel.

When assistance, support, and remediation for marginal or incompetent teachers fails to yield the desired improvements, legal issues often come into play. Much of the law regarding teachers that relates to dismissal is based around the teacher evaluation process.

> Teacher performance evaluations play a critical role in assuring that schools maintain a high quality of faculty, making teacher evaluations essential tools in the effective operation of schools. The evaluation process does, however, result in a high stakes process for everyone. Because of the potential consequences, including possible

dismissal, teachers obviously want to receive a positive evaluation. (Dayton & Recesso, 2007, p. 1)

Therefore, "when matters of the employment status of the teacher come before a court, there is a need to reach a decision about competency" (Rosenberger & Plimpton, 1975, p. 469). According to Rosenberger and Plimpton, part of the difficulty for administrators lies in that:

They have had no experience in gathering pertinent evidence, presenting it, or in defending a point of view in a court of law. Add to this the public relations and staff relations implications of making decisions on competence, and inaction is often the result. (1975, p. 470)

When a teacher dismissal case must be defended in a court, in order for it to be upheld, "the quality of the evidence" is as "equally as important as the quality of the reasons" (Rosenberger & Plimpton, 1975, p. 479). The courts are often involved in hearing cases and appeals with regard to teacher dismissal; "the dismissal of teachers at any time and for any reason is a matter of concern to the public and the profession alike" (Fleming, 1978, p. 423).

The "Fair Dismissal Law" of Georgia originated in 1975, and has had several amendments since that time. In the current Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.), the Fair Dismissal Law is described in the following Code sections:

§ 20-2-940: Procedure for termination or suspension

§ 20-2-942: Nonrenewal or demotion

§ 20-2-943: Powers of board

§ 20-2-944: Letters of reprimand

§ 20-2-945: Implementing rules

§ 20-2-946: Applicability

§ 20-2-947: Construction

§ 20-2-1160: Powers of county or other local boards as school court

Teachers and administrators in all public school systems in the state of Georgia are subject to the rights and responsibilities described in these sections of the O.C.G.A.

In the state of Georgia in order to begin employment in a public school system, an educator must: (1) possess a valid Georgia Teaching Certificate issued by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, and (2) must have been issued and signed a contract for employment with that school system. Contracts for teachers in Georgia can be issued for only one year at a time (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-942). Teachers are either considered "non-tenured" or "tenured." Non-tenured teachers are teachers who have not yet signed their fourth consecutive employment contract with the same local board of education. If a teacher is non-tenured:

> There can be no expectancy on the part of the employee to be offered a new contract at the end of the contract year, nor does an expectancy exist on the part of the employer that this year's employee will accept a new contract for the ensuing year. (Frequently Asked Legal Questions, Professional Association of Georgia Educators, n.d.)

Once a teacher signs his or her fourth consecutive employment contract with the same local board of education, he or she becomes tenured (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-942). Once an employee becomes a tenured employee, he or she enjoys "a right to continued employment in that school system" (Frequently Asked Legal Questions, Professional Association of Georgia Educators, n.d.). The school system must renew the tenured employee's contract year after year "unless good cause to nonrenew can be shown" (Frequently Asked Legal Questions, Professional Association of Georgia Educators, n.d.).

Any teacher, whether non-tenured or tenured, is subject to the same applicable reasons for termination or suspension under O.C.G.A. § 20-2-940: Procedure for termination or suspension. This Code section outlines seven areas of the law: grounds for termination or suspension, notice, service, counsel/testimony, hearing, decision/appeals, and superintendent's

power to relieve from duty temporarily. According to this section of the Code, there are eight

specific grounds for termination or suspension:

> A teacher, principal, or other employee having a contract for a definite term may be terminated or suspended for the following reasons: (1) Incompetency; (2) Insubordination; (3) Willful neglect of duties; (4) Immorality; (5) Inciting, encouraging, or counseling students to violate any valid state law, municipal ordinance, or policy or rule of the local board of education; (6) To reduce staff due to loss of students or cancellation of programs; (7) Failure to secure and maintain necessary educational training; or (8) Any good and sufficient cause. [O.C.G.A. § 20-2-940 subsection (a)(1-8)]

This section of the Georgia Code also spells out the rights that an employee has with regard to

notice of the possibility of discharge or suspension: "written notice of the charges shall be given

at least ten days before the date set for the hearing." There are specific items that must be

included in that written notification to the employee. These include the cause or causes for the

charges with sufficient detail, the names of known witnesses and a concise summary of the

evidence, the time and the place of the hearing, and a statement that the charged employee will

be furnished, upon request, subpoena or compulsory process to legally require the attendance of

witnesses and productions of documents as provided by law [O.C.G.A. § 20-2-940 subsection (b)

1-4)].

With regard to service of the notice, employees have the right to be served in the

following manner.

> All notices required by this part relating to suspension from duty shall be served either personally or by certified mail or statutory overnight delivery. All notices required by their part relating to demotion, termination, nonrenewal of contract, or reprimand shall be served by certified mail or statutory overnight delivery. [O.C.G.A. § 20-2-940 subsection (c)]

An employee who has had charges brought against them is entitled to be represented by counsel,

and, upon request, "is entitled to have subpoenas or other compulsory process issued for

attendance of witnesses and the production of documents and other evidence" [O.C.G.A. § 20-2-

940 subsection (d)]. These subpoenas must be issued in the name of the local board. The subsection of this Code section that describes hearings dictates that the hearing must be held at the local board's expense and must be conducted by the local board or by a designated tribunal on behalf of the board who will report to the board. Oaths must be administered and taken by all witnesses who provide testimony at the hearing. Questions relating to the admissibility of evidence or other legal matters are to be decided by the chairman of the local board or the tribunal, or a disinterested member of the State Bar of Georgia agreed upon by both parties. "In all hearings, the burden of proof shall be on the school system, and it shall have the right to open and to conclude" [O.C.G.A. § 20-2-940 subsection (e)]. In addition, as outlined in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-1160 (b), teachers who disagree with the final decision of a hearing from the local board of education may appeal to the State Board of Education.

The final two subsections of Code section 20-2-940 state the requirements regarding a decision regarding the hearing, appeals to the hearing, and the superintendent's power to relieve someone from duty temporarily. The local board must render its decision either at the hearing or within five days after the hearing if the board itself presided at the hearing. If the hearing was before a tribunal, the tribunal must file its findings and recommendations with the local board within five days of the hearing and then the local board must render its decision based on the information from the tribunal within ten days after that [O.C.G.A. § 20-2-940 subsection (f)]. In very serious cases, the superintendent does have the right to temporarily remove an employee from duty:

> The superintendent of a local school system may temporarily relieve from duty any teacher, principal, or other employee having a contract for a definite term for any reason specified in subsection (a) of this Code section, pending hearing by the local board in those cases where the charges are of such seriousness or other circumstances exist which indicate that such teacher or employee could not be permitted to continue to perform his

duties pending hearing without danger of disruption or other serious harm to the school, its mission, pupils, or personnel. [O.C.G.A. § 20-2-940 subsection (g)]

In cases where this is warranted, the superintendent and local board are still required to abide by the subsection (b) of this Code section with regard to notice. Employees temporarily relieved of duty pending hearing are paid during the leave pending the hearing.

While the provisions for termination or suspension are the same for non-tenured and tenured teachers, there is a difference in the provisions regarding nonrenewal or demotion for non-tenured and tenured teachers. While for non-tenured teachers there is no right of expectation for continued employment, tenured teachers, or those who have signed their fourth consecutive contract in the same local school system, do enjoy such a right. According to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-942 subsection (b)(1),

A teacher who accepts a school year contract for the fourth consecutive school year from the same local board of education may be demoted or the teacher's contract may not be renewed only for those reasons set forth in subsection (a) of Code Section 20-2-940.

This Code section also requires that "in order to demote or fail to renew a teacher who accepts a school year contract for the fourth or subsequent consecutive school year from the same local board of education," there are several stipulations which must be met [O.C.G.A. § 20-2-942 subsection (b)(2)]. These include the requirement of written notice with wording requirements and necessary enclosures spelled out specifically in the Code section. In addition,

A teacher is deemed to have accepted a fourth consecutive school year contract if, while the teacher is serving under the third consecutive school year contract, the local board does not serve notice on the teacher by April 15 that it intends not to renew the teacher's contract for the ensuing school year, and the teacher does not serve notice in writing on the local school board of education by May 1 of the third consecutive year that he or she does not accept the fourth consecutive contract. [O.C.G.A. § 20-2-942 subsection (b)(3)]

This Code section also defines the specific dates under which an educator in Georgia could no longer acquire tenure as an administrator, and includes the amendment that all teachers, whether

hired on or after July 1, 2000 or prior to July 1, 2000 shall acquire the rights outlined under this Code section. Previously, Georgia HB1187 had eliminated tenure for beginning teachers who were hired on or after July 1, 2000, but Georgia SB193 "reinstated tenure for all teachers beginning on July 1, 2004" (Frequently Asked Legal Questions, Professional Association of Georgia Educators, n.d.).

Local boards of education are authorized in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-943 to terminate the contract of a teacher or other employee, suspend a teacher or other employee, and reinstate a teacher or other employee under the specific definitions outlined in Code section 20-2-940. Local boards of education are authorized in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-943 to nonrenew the contract of a teacher or other employee, renew the contract of a teacher or other employee, and demote a teacher or other employee from one position to another which has less responsibility, prestige, and salary under the specific definitions outlined in Code section 20-2-942. O.C.G.A. § 20-2-944 indicates that superintendents may also write letters of reprimand to teachers or other employees. The teacher or other employee receiving the letter does have the right to appeal the decision of the superintendent to the local board of education, which can affirm or reverse the decision of the superintendent.

While the Fair Dismissal Law outlines rights and responsibilities of educators with regard to dismissal, the Code of Ethics for Educators from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission describes specific behaviors and acts which are expected of educators and specific behaviors and acts which are prohibited. Many of the stipulations and requirements of the Code of Ethics for Educators are also supported by Georgia Law in the Official Code of Georgia Annotated.

Moral and Ethical Issues

This section of the review of the literature describes the role of the supervisor in working with marginal teachers and the difficulties involved. The goal of improving instruction for students is examined. The supervisory versus evaluatory role of the principal and the dilemma that causes are also explored.

The work of educators is fraught with moral and ethical issues. In the case of marginal teaching, there are moral and ethical implications for both the teachers and the supervisors involved. Fuhr (1993) contends that many school administrators rank supervising marginal teachers as one of their toughest challenges (p. 42). Ehrgott et al. (1993) also found "site administrators view working with marginal teachers as one of their more difficult tasks, in part because a disproportionate amount of time is required. In addition, they find many marginal teachers to be defensive and difficult to work with" (p. 19). This must be in part because "as unfortunate as it is, all people in the teaching profession do not belong in it. Principals must keep as their number one goal placing children first" (Maulding & Joachim, 2000, p. 17). Tucker (1997) believed, "The many issues associated with the identification of the teacher who is performing unsatisfactorily and with his or her possible dismissal can deter even the most committed administrator" (p.105). Maulding and Joachim (2000) also contended that, "The most important factor the principal must keep in mind in all of these stages of improvement is the children" (p. 19). Kaye (2004) stated, "The need to understand marginal teaching is the need to understand what is good or not good for children. This need was and remains a moral obligation" (p. 235). Kaye further discusses the issue by saying:

> Dilemmas facing educators in arriving at relevant responses to marginal teaching are complex and span humanistic, legal, and practical domains, yet recognition and employment of effective responses to marginal teaching is a fundamental issue in the supervision and evaluation of educational personnel. Integrating professional and moral

accountability into practice offers a foundation for developing and implementing responses to marginal teaching. (2004, pp. 257-258)

Phillips and Young (1997) agreed that working with marginal teachers causes conflict when they asserted that supervisors "experienced the conflict between commitment for just treatment for incompetent teachers and concern for the educational well-being of the students of those teachers" (p. 115). It is detrimental to students and to the culture and climate of the school when "administrators take a position of 'insulating' their marginal teachers, implementing short term, simple remedies such as switching grade levels or seeking transfer or dismissal, rather than taking a systematic approach with instructional improvement as a goal" (Ehrgott et al., 1993, p.19).

Part of the complexity of dealing with marginal teachers is working with them and providing them support while still encouraging the teachers who are not marginal. Fuhr (1993) explained it this way,

> Marginal performers may be upset when you confront them and encourage them to deal with their problems. On the other hand, your top performers will continue to be upset if marginal teachers are not brought up to par. Good teachers respect administrators who are not afraid to identify and correct poor performance anywhere on their staffs. If management fails to make required decisions, eliminate poor performance or praise good performance, and conduct productive faculty/staff development programs, teacher performance will decline, and negative attitudes will form. Then, school management is the marginal performer. Management must first improve to achieve improved staff performance and attitudes. (p. 44)

If a situation is not handled well, it then reflects poorly not only on the marginal teacher but on the administration and supervisors. The principal is the instructional leader of the school, and their first responsibility with regard to marginal teachers is "to assist in helping the teacher see the need for improvement" (Maulding & Joachim, 2000, p. 16). Mauldin and Joachim asserted:

> The first task the supervisor (usually the principal) must do is ensure to his/her staff that instructional leadership is the main focus of his/her position. A partnership between principal and teacher must be created. Teachers, through efforts made by the principal

and qualities exemplified by the principals, should recognize and respect the desire of the principal to see the success of all children. (p. 16)

To create this partnership, the principal must undertake an intensive and time-consuming process of coaching, mentoring, and support. "A marginal teacher needs continuous feedback, not only to improve, but to continue to improve" (Maulding & Joachim, 2000, p.17).

While peer coaching is important to the process, the ultimate responsibility rests with the principal. Zepeda (2006) asserts the following:

> Although supervision as peer coaching and intensive mentoring by teachers for teachers can forward the original intents of supervision, administrators cannot get off the hook so easily; teachers need support and leaders willing to make supervision a precursor to annual evaluation. The intents behind supervision and evaluations are quite different; however, evaluation without supervision first smacks of professional malpractice."
> (p. 68)

Kaye (2004) also asserted that "professional support for marginal teachers through some reduction in the demands of teaching assignments is indicated despite a possible connection of these actions to a hidden reward system for marginality" (p. 251). Despite how well the situation is handled, there is often still resentment among teaching colleagues.

Supervision and evaluation are the most important roles the principal or supervisor plays in the issue of marginal teaching. According to Veir and Dagley (2002), "teacher evaluation is one of the primary means of improving educational instruction, enhancing educational services, and justifying the removal of substandard teachers" (p. 2). Professional development also plays a major role. Zepeda (2006) explained:

> All schools have teacher support structures—supervision, professional development, and teacher evaluation. However, many school leaders fail to connect these support structures to create seamless learning opportunities for teachers. For professional development to make a difference in the lives of teachers, and, by extension, the lives of students, teachers need multiple learning opportunities bundled to work in concert with each other.
> (p. 65)

It is the responsibility of the principal or supervisor to make it all work together to improve instruction, because "effective supervisors recognize the relationship between accountability, improved teaching, support that teachers need, and the relationships that supervisors build with teachers" (Zepeda, 2006, p. 65). Kaye (2004) also indicated that the processes of supervision and evaluation were intertwined and interdependent when she said

> Adoption of supervisory practices that foster positive growth, improvement, or change focusing on professional development, clinical supervision, reflective practice, peer coaching, and mentorship in a climate of trust forms a strong basis for professional support from other teachers. Strengths of summative strategies implemented by evaluators to judge merit lie in identification of marginal teaching, documentation of specific areas of concern, and clear communication to the marginal teacher of the need for change. (p. 251)

Zepeda (2006) shared that the culture of the school must support collaboration in order for marginal teachers to be able to make any progress. "Without a school culture that supports collaboration, the principal's supervisory efforts will yield few lasting results. Without collaboration, learning communities cannot develop" (p. 65).

Kaye (2004) asserted "schools with a sense of community are schools with a shared professional knowledge of a common purpose and an understanding by members of the interdependence" (p. 257). Attempting to assist and coach marginal teachers can be difficult, especially if the teacher "genuinely" sees "a lack of reason on his/her part to improve" (Maulding & Joachim, 2000, p. 17). According to Kaye "teachers perceived the absence of supportive and caring school environments to be a primary factor in negative professional growth and development" (p. 253). But Kaye also found that other teachers feel "a sense of betrayal toward the students and the profession of teaching" when they spoke of marginal teaching and marginal teachers (p. 253).

Working with marginal teachers is difficult for all parties, not just the teacher. Phillips and Young (1997) found that "since part of the process of working with such [marginal] teachers was to confront them with their shortcomings, this was often a very painful experience for both the administrator and the teacher" (p. 116). Administrators can often only do so much. Fuhr (1993) found that "it is not the job of school administrators to advise on ways to correct a chronically destructive attitude" (p. 43).

The role of the supervisor related to the quality of teaching in their school begins with the hiring process and must extend through the supervisor's efforts with coaching and professional development and into supervision and evaluation. Zepeda (2006) contented that

> Supervision and evaluation must first be broadly examined, then specifically aligned more to the characteristics of teachers—traditionally certified, alternatively certified, beginning, mid-career, and veteran teachers, out-of-field teachers, and teachers who have delayed or re-entered the profession. To align supervision to the characteristics of teachers, supervisors must know the people in their buildings. Gaining this insight about teachers' needs starts during the hiring process and continues throughout their careers. (p. 68)

Darling-Hammond et al. (1983) explains that there is a significant difference between detecting, preventing, and correcting teaching deficiencies, and that the focus must unfortunately be on the correction of such deficiencies.

> *Detecting* teacher incompetencies involves the development and careful application of reliable, generalizable measures of teaching knowledge or behavior. The state-of-the-art of measurement for teacher evaluation may not be adequate. *Preventing* incompetencies implies the development of either a fool-proof approach to teacher training or a teacher-proof approach to instruction; we leave that to the utopians. *Correcting* deficiencies seems a more approachable objective; however, this is the point at which research on teaching effectiveness leaves off and where summative and formative evaluation approaches collide. (p. 287, emphasis in the original)

The formative evaluation process is what will ultimately help teachers improve, while the summative evaluation process is what will help remove them from the classroom. When one

person, the principal, is ultimately responsible for both processes, which appear to work at cross-purposes, there is bound to be moral and ethical conflict.

There is often so much change in administrative personnel that working with a marginal teacher carries from one principal to another. Tenure also plays into the process. Claxton (1986) contends that it is a serious problem for "public school administrators who attempt to remove incompetent or inefficient teachers from the classroom once they have attained tenured status" (p. 181). In Kaye's 2004 study, she found that teachers "expressed strong concerns that protection of marginal teachers by both teachers' professional organizations and continuing employment contracts hindered effective administrative responses" to marginal teaching (p. 254). Tucker (1997) asserted the following:

> The educational community can no longer afford to act as if all our children attend schools in Lake Wobegon, where all the teachers are competent and all the children score above average. The learning inequity created by incompetent teachers for millions of children each year cannot be ignored. There is an estimated incompetence rate ranging from 5 to 15 percent, yet administrators respond to less that 3 percent of these teachers. (p. 118)

"It is not surprising that some supervisors interviewed found it difficult to confront teachers about poor performance when that level of performance had been accepted for a long period of time by other supervisors," found Phillips and Young (1997, p. 112).

Principals must take the responsibility of supervision and evaluation as a moral and ethical duty. Zepeda (2006) said, "What appears to be elusive is providing supervision and evaluation that is responsive to the broad-range of needs of teachers who have differing experience levels, varying degrees of preparation, and who, for compelling reasons, are teaching out-of-field" (p. 67). Zepeda continued:

> The new mantra for supervision in this millennium and beyond should be *we must do more* to break the outmoded culture of neglect, where evaluation for accountability supplants supervision that promotes growth and development. For supervision to achieve

this lofty goal, these seemingly enduring practices must be replaced with more accurately responsive thinking and action toward the very characteristics of any given teacher in any given school. (p. 68, emphasis in the original)

The ultimate goal of supervision is improved instruction, but Phillips and Young (1997) noted that this is not always the outcome when they stated:

A supervisory attitude that integrates caring and justice opens up the possibility of candid discussions about the various options that may be available to the teacher and the supervisor, and the consequences of each option. It is then more possible for the supervisor to be supportive of the teacher, while helping that person realize or acknowledge that teaching is not a viable occupation at the time or in those circumstances. (p. 119)

Instructional supervision must not only be a priority for the principal but for the institution as well, in order for the necessary time and resources to be allotted for it to be undertaken successfully. Tucker (1997) found:

Given the time available to conduct a credible evaluation process, the intensive work that is necessary when dealing with an incompetent teacher may be sacrificed when a principal is evaluating at least twenty-two other teachers annually, handling student discipline, and completing all the other professional responsibilities of an administrator. If instructional supervision and evaluation of teachers are organizational priorities, then more time and resources must be committed to these activities as part of professionalism in schools. (p. 117)

For supervision and evaluation to be effective, they must be institutional priorities.

The moral and ethical issues and conflict that arises when working with marginal teachers focuses on the supervisory versus evaluatory capacity of the principal and that principal's responsibility to assist the teacher improve while at the same time guaranteeing a high quality education for the students in his/her charge. In both cases, the goals are working at cross-purposes and are bound to create moral and ethical conflict.

This chapter was a review of the literature with regard to the following topics: highly qualifies teachers and accountability, marginal teaching, incompetent teachers, legal issues and personnel, and the moral and ethical issues related to marginal teachers.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The overall purpose of the study was to examine the perspectives of elementary school principals related to the issues and barriers that they faced when dealing with marginal teachers. The overall research questions of the study were:

1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?

2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?

3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?

4. What types of supports do elementary principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?

The method used to gather data in this study was two individual semi-structured interviews with each participant. Because the data were personal, individual, and experience-based, a qualitative study was appropriate.

Five elementary principals were selected to participate in this study. The first interview was conducted to determine each participant's definition and description of marginal teachers and to explore experiences they had personally working with marginal teachers. The second interview was conducted to determine the types of supports the participants used when working

with marginal teachers as administrators, and the issues and barriers they encountered. It was also important to gain an understanding of the type of toll such work took on the principal, their school climate, and the students at the school.

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

Constructivism

Constructivism is the theoretical framework underlying this research. Schwandt (1994) stated that the constructivist "believes that to understand this world of meaning, one must interpret it" (p. 118). Because individuals develop their own meanings from their beliefs and experiences, "all knowledge is tentative, subjective, and personal" (Airasian & Walsh, 1997, p. 445). Airasian and Walsh contend that this philosophy is founded on the primary assumption that "people create knowledge from the interaction between their existing knowledge or beliefs and the new ideas or situations they encounter" (p. 445). By using a constructivist approach and open-ended interviews, the researcher sought to obtain the perspectives of principals working in the field with marginal teachers. Patton (1990) contends, "The task for the interviewer is to make it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world. The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (p. 279).

By using the framework of social constructivism, there is a focus on how meanings and understandings develop from social interactions with others. Schwandt (1994) stated "we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge" (p. 125). Schwandt elaborated by stating "constructivists are deeply committed to the contrary view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by the mind" (p. 125). Constructivists look at how individuals

learn by "focusing on how each individual constructs knowledge in a social setting" (Jaramillo, 1996, p. 136). The researcher used the framework of social constructivism to guide the creation of the interview questions, the data collection, and the analysis of the data. As Patton (1990) shared, the researcher believed that her "task" was "to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking" (p. 24).

Rationale and Research Design

The researcher set out to discover the perspectives of elementary school principals about the issues and barriers they face when working with marginal teachers, and then to represent the data thematically using the interview questions to frame the findings. From the data, themes that emerged are presented with analysis. Two one-hour interviews were conducted with five elementary principals over a series of four months using a semi-structured interview format with open-ended questions. As a researcher, I subscribed to Patton's (1990) beliefs that, "the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (p. 278). Moreover, "the standardized open-ended interview consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words" (Patton, p. 280). The interviews were recorded and hand-written field notes were taken during the interviews.

Although the interview questions were formally written in a guide (see Appendix A), a semi-structured format allowed the researcher to use probes where appropriate during the interviews. Another strength of open-ended questions "is to enable the researcher to understand

and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (Patton, 1990, p. 24).

<div align="center">Data Sources</div>

Given that the purpose of the study was to examine the perspectives of elementary school principals about the issues and barriers that they face when dealing with marginal teachers, the researcher sought to select principals who had some experience with personnel and who had similar training and procedural guidelines and expectations for dealing with marginal teachers. New or inexperienced principals would not be able to provide perspectives about dealing first-hand with marginal teachers.

The participants in the study were five elementary school principals employed in a single large, urban school system in the state of Georgia. All of the participants had a minimum of four years experience as an elementary school principal, and each had been the principal at their current respective school for a minimum of two years. The study was conducted through two interviews with each principal. The researcher gained permission to conduct the research in the school system by submitting a Research Proposal according to Board Policy to the Research and Program Evaluation Committee.

Contextual Setting of the Study

The school system from which the population of five elementary school principals was selected was a large, urban school system in Georgia. It was a convenient sampling in a school system with which the researcher was familiar. The system served a county with a population of 96,000 residents. Of the county population, 65% of the residents were African-American, 32% were Caucasian, and 3% were other races.

The Hazzard County School System (a pseudonym) served 24,500 students in grades PreK through 12 and employed 1,900 certified teachers and 1,200 support staff. There were 65 building level administrators (principals and assistant principals) and 28 central office administrators (directors, assistant superintendents, deputy superintendents, and the superintendent) in the system. There were 41 schools in the system. Of these, 26 were elementary schools, seven were middle schools, six were high schools, and two were specialty schools. The population of the student body of the school system was 78% African-American, 28% Caucasian, and 4% other races. Eighty percent of the student population qualified for the free and reduced meal program.

Participant Profiles

The participants in the study were five elementary school principals employed in the Hazzard County School System, a large, urban school system in the state of Georgia. The years of experience as elementary principals represented by the participants ranged from four years to 10 years. All five of the participants were female. Three of the participants were Caucasian, and two were African-American. The participants were chosen to participate based on their willingness to do so. Table 3.1 illustrates the profile of the participants. All names are pseudonyms to protect the identification of the school system and the principal participants.

Sarah Moore

Sarah Moore had 36 years of experience in education, with 16 years in the Hazzard County School System. She had experience teaching all levels from preschool through college. Of Sarah's 16 years with the Hazzard County School System, she had been an administrator for nine years, and a principal for four of those years. Sarah had earned a master's degree, a specialist degree, and a doctoral degree, all in the area of educational leadership.

Table 3.1

Profile of the Participants

	Sarah Moore	Nancy Collins	Cathy Cook	Linda Neal	Dorothy Vinson
Years Experience in Education	36	16	21	33	35
Years Experience as an Administrator	9	11	9	13	8
Years Experience as a Principal	4	7	8	10	5
Years in the Hazzard County School System	16	16	6	33	35
Advanced Education Degrees Earned	M.Ed. Ed.S. Ed.D.	M.Ed. Ed.S.	M.Ed. Ed.S. Ed.D.	M.Ed.	M.Ed. Ed.S. Ed.D.

Nancy Collins

Nancy Collins knew very early in her education career that she wanted to be an administrator. After five years as a classroom teacher, Nancy became an assistant principal. Nancy had worked in the Hazzard County School System for all of her 16 years in education, and had been a principal for seven years. All of Nancy's experience was in elementary schools. Nancy had earned her master's and specialist degrees in educational leadership.

Cathy Cook

Cathy Cook had 21 years of experience as an educator, and had worked in 1 other school system before becoming employed in the Hazzard County School System. Cathy had worked as a teacher, an instructional coordinator, and an administrator at the secondary level before becoming an elementary principal. She had been a principal for eight years. Cathy had earned her master's, specialist, and doctoral degrees in educational leadership.

Linda Neal

All of Linda Neal's 33 years of experience were with the Hazzard County School System. She had worked as a music teacher and an elementary teacher for 20 years before she became an assistant principal. Linda had been a principal for 10 years. She had earned her master's degree in educational leadership.

Dorothy Vinson

Dorothy Vinson worked as an elementary school teacher and a school counselor before entering administration. She was an assistant principal for three years, and had been a principal for five years. All of Dorothy's 35 years of experience was in the Hazzard County School System. Dorothy had earned her master's, specialist, and doctoral degrees in educational leadership.

Data Collection

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Research and Program Evaluation Committee of the Hazzard County School System as well as the Institutional Review Board at The University of Georgia. All participants were provided with an informed consent statement that detailed the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the data from the study, the risks and the benefits for the participant, and contact information for the researcher (see Appendix B). The statements were signed by the researcher and the participants, and a copy was provided to each participant. Participants were assured of their confidentiality throughout the study through the use of pseudonyms for the system and the participants.

Data collection for the study occurred in the fall of 2009. The researcher interviewed each participant two times for approximately one hour each time. Interviews were audio taped and were transcribed and the data reviewed in a timely manner. Only the researcher and the

researcher's major professor had access to the data. Other sources of data were gathered from fieldnotes.

The researcher contacted each participant in person to request their participation in the study. The researcher allowed the participants to select the time and place for all interviews. All of the interviews took place in the participants' offices at their respective schools.

The first interview began with a description of the study, details of the participant's and researcher's backgrounds and responsibilities, and a review of the overall research questions. The first set of interview questions were focused on the participant's personal definitions of terms and the personal experiences they had working with marginal teachers, both as a coworker and as an administrator.

The second interview began with giving the participants the opportunity to review and respond to the transcripts of the content of the first interview. The second set of interview questions were focused on the types of support that can be given to teachers, involvement of other staff, and involvement of central office personnel while working with marginal teachers.

During each interview, depending on the responses of the participants, additional follow-up questions were asked for clarification purposes. These questions could not be predetermined since they were dependent on the dialogue taking place in the interview. To provide additional support to the data from the interviews, all of the participants were asked after each interview to share any artifacts or documents they used or had created with regard to working with marginal teachers at their respective schools. In all five cases, the participants indicated that they had artifacts or documents to share, but none of the participants followed through with these statements or shared any items or documents with the researcher. Given the highly sensitive

nature of working with personnel in general, and in particular marginal teachers, the researcher only followed up twice with the participants.

Data Analysis

Following each of the interviews, the researcher listened to the audiotape recording of the interview and transcribed it. The researcher then read the transcription of each interview looking for key words, key comments, and commonalities in the responses from each of the participants. The researcher developed a chart for each interview transcript, which included the four overall research questions and the words and comments from the interviews that were related to each research question.

The following tables (Tables 3.2 - 3.6) summarize the major themes from the responses that each of the participants had to the four major research questions. There is one table for each participant. Within each table, the major findings are organized by research question. The analysis format was important for further analysis of the data. Once finding common themes and patterns in the data for the overall interview and research questions, the researcher then reviewed the transcripts for specific supporting details, quotes, comments, and examples related to each research question.

Data analysis took place throughout the data collection process, as the researcher worked to listen analytically to the audio-recordings, taking notes, and then referring to the field notes taken during the interviews. In addition, each interview was transcribed and analyzed prior to the next interview so the researcher could clarify and probe regarding data collected. Due to the fact that the participants were unable to clearly delineate between marginal and incompetent teachers in their responses, the researcher changed the research protocol after the first round of interviews with the participants concluded.

Table 3.2

Responses: Sarah Moore

Research Question	Response
1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?	'Not delivering quality instruction - Same problems over and over - More difficult to work with incompetent than marginal - Marginal teachers have a glimmer of hope - Like a person with alcohol or drug addiction - Have to admit there is a problem 20% curriculum 80% management - poor people skills
2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?	- People don't admit they have a problem "Open warfare" at the school - The time it takes - Confidentiality - It can change the culture and climate of a building - They must have personal contact from the principal
3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?	- The time it takes - Central office staff have more experience and resources to work on classroom management issues - Lack of offerings for classroom management for veteran teachers - Need more support in management area - Need plans for disruptive children in the elementary school
4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?	- Central office has classroom management classes, but not enough of them - Coaches are already in place - They are well-trained and well-supported by central office - Behavior specialists - Protocol from HR for at-risk process - New teacher orientation and follow up

Table 3.3

Responses: Nancy Collins

Research Question	Response
1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?	• Marginal concerns may not be as apparent • Marginal is harder to work with • You have to be more direct with the incompetent teacher • Trying to save marginal teachers • Trying to get rid of incompetent teachers
2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?	• Using building teachers as role models or mentors for marginal teachers can strain relationships • Difficult on culture • Personalities • They don't recognize they need help • Other teachers on staff resent the support, attention, and resources the at-risk teacher is getting • Climate impact is mostly at the grade level
3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?	• Having to leave an incompetent teacher in the classroom with children while you work with them
4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?	• Professional literature • Book studies • Building level coaches • Legal advice from the attorneys • At-risk process

Table 3.4

Responses: Cathy Cook

Research Question	Response
1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?	• Hard to change marginal teachers • Marginal can be helped, incompetent can't • Teachers will help a marginal coworker • Teachers get frustrated with an incompetent coworker • Making a teacher understand that they are marginal or incompetent • Devote more energy to marginal than to incompetent • Marginal usually want to be helped
2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?	• Social entanglements • Teachers work and socialize in the community • Having to defend teacher publically when you know she is wrong • Time • Paperwork • No assistant principal • Hard to "get" someone—evaluation instrument is ambiguous
3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?	• Need more instructional staff • Need clear guidance ahead of time on documentation • Culture is to try not to fire teachers • Length of the process • Documentation required • Teachers get transferred in (inheriting teachers)
4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?	• Professional learning classes • Teaching and learning department

Table 3.5

Responses: Linda Neal

Research Question	Response
1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?	- Admitting that there is a problem - Takes a lot of time - There is a fine line between do I help or it's time to go - Teaching is a calling - Children suffer - Classroom management issues tied to instruction - Difference in success or failure for marginal teachers is the desire to change
2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?	- Long process - Admitting a problem - Too difficult to get rid of a bad teacher "inherited" staff - degrades the culture of the school
3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?	- Lack of documentation - Length of the process - Need more of a "corporate" approach - Teachers with tenure - Too hard to get rid of the bad teachers - Colleges need to weed out poor teachers
4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?	- At-risk process $ for subs - Providing coaches

Table 3.6

Responses: Dorothy Vinson

Research Question	Response
1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?	- Must be coachable - Very difficult - You can work with marginal teachers - Must involve a lot of reflection - Must give them the benefit of the doubt - Teachers are an investment - Relates to the age of accountability
2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?	- Won't admit it - Want to do their own thing - Teachers are willing to help and support other teachers - Investing in people - Time - Principal's own lack of knowledge - Discipline problems - Energy "Sacrificing" children - Only as strong as our weakest link - Students suffering 75-80% management problems
3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?	- Time - Scheduling
4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?	- Money for subs - Observing classrooms in other schools - Training for mentors (TSS) and coaches - Teacher liaison from HR - Relationships with TAPP providers yielded support

Table 3.7

Compiled Responses

Research Question	Response
1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?	• Marginal teachers—trying to save them—they can be helped • Incompetent teachers—trying to get rid of them—they can't be helped • Teachers as an investment (time, money, resources, training, etc.) • Support, support, support • Mentors/coaches/reflection • Ultimately, teacher has to recognize and admit the problem and be willing to work to change • Children suffer • Teaching is a calling • Difference of opinion regarding problem being instruction or management
2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?	• The first step is admitting you have a problem • Time—it is a long process • Documentation • Effect on climate and culture in the building—especially at that grade level • Confidentiality • "Inherited" staff • Teachers will help a marginal co-worker • Teachers resent an incompetent co-worker • Principal's own lack of knowledge • Social entanglements • Personalities

Table 3.7 *continued*

Research Question	Response
3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?	• Time • Need clear expectations and examples of documentation requirements • More classroom management training for all teachers and support for at-risk teachers • Teachers with tenure • Scheduling assistance—limited number of support personnel from central office available • Some schools need more instructional coaches/assistant principals • The overall culture in education is not to fire teachers • Teachers get transferred around • Leaving an incompetent teacher in the classroom while working with her is sacrificing student achievement
4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?	• Building level coaches • Money for subs and release time • At-risk process—coordinated effort of departments • Human Resources • Professional Learning—classroom management classes • Other principals—observations in other schools • Teacher Support Specialist Training and Certification • New Teacher Orientation • Behavior Specialists can observe • Professional Literature • Book Studies • Legal advice during the at-risk process

The researcher first read each interview transcript separately, without marking or making any notes. The researcher then paired the two interview transcripts from each participant and reread those as one document, again not marking or taking any notes. The researcher then read

the interview transcripts and made a running record of key terms, themes, and ideas, making a

separate table for each respondent.

After making these five separate tables based around the four major research questions,

the researcher compared the five tables, making note of words, terms, themes, and ideas that

appeared in more than one of the respondents' interviews. After recording the key words and key

comments from each of the interviews into the respective tables, the researcher then combined

the results into one combined table and looked for common words, topics, concepts, and themes

that emerged with regard to each of the four research questions. Table 3.7 illustrates the

compiled results of this portion of the data analysis.

The researcher then took the list of common words, topics, concepts, and themes and

compiled them into a table of topics that emerged in more than one of the respondents'

interviews. This is illustrated in Table 3.8.

The researcher used the table of initial topics that emerged to develop abbreviations and

code words to coincide with each topic. Then these abbreviations and code words were marked

or coded in the interview transcripts. The researcher reread each interview transcript and

highlighted specific comments that stood out to her. The abbreviations and code words illustrated

in Table 3.9 were used to mark the various topics in the margins of the transcripts.

The researcher also referred to the field notes and marked the interview transcripts where

the respondents had had specific physical reactions during their interviews to coincide with their

commentary.

During the interview process, the participants appeared relaxed. They spoke freely and

appeared earnest and sincere in their responses. The participants were reminded of the purpose of

the study and of each of the four overall research questions at the beginning of each of the two

Table 3.8

Initial Topics that Emerged

Research Question	Topics
1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?	- Marginal vs. Incompetent - Principals must provide support for marginal teachers - The first step it to admit that you have a problem - The children are the ones who suffer the most - Teaching is a calling - Instructional Issues versus Classroom Management Issues - Termination
2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work marginal teachers?	- Working with marginal teachers is a long, time consuming process - Paperwork and documentation - The impact on the climate and culture of the school - Maintaining confidentiality "Inheriting" staff - How teachers will help a co-worker who is struggling - Personalities and social entanglements - The principal's own lack of knowledge and expertise
3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?	- Time—working around others' schedules - Protocol for documentation—is everyone doing the same thing? - Classroom management support - Teachers with tenure - Having enough instructional support staff
4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?	- Teachers are a major investment in time, money, effort, training - Mentors, coaches, reflection - Building level coaches and instructional staff are key "At-Risk" Process - Human Resources support - Professional Learning support—New Teacher Orientation/Teacher Support Specialists/Induction—book studies—professional literature - Support from other principals and teachers in the system

Table 3.9

Abbreviations and Code Words

Research Question	Abbreviations	Code Words
1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?	marg/incomp	Marginal or Incompetent
	pers involve	Principals must provide support for marginal teachers
	admit	The first step is to admit that you have a problem
	suffer	The children are the ones who suffer the most
	instruct/mgmt	Instructional Issues versus Classroom Management Issues
	enough	When it is time to think about termination
2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work marginal teachers?	time	Working with marginal teachers is a long, time consuming process
	document	Paperwork and documentation
	climate	The impact on the climate and culture of the school
	confidentiality	Maintaining confidentiality
	personalities/ calling/limits	Personalities and the call to be a teacher – The principal's own lack of knowledge and expertise
3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?	protocol	Protocol for documentation
	how	How can I help
	tenure/lemons	Teachers with tenure/teachers shifting around to avoid termination

Table 3.9 *continued*

Research Question	Abbreviations	Code Words
4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?	investment	Teachers are a major investment in time, money, effort, training
	coaching	Coaching is the key – Building level coaches and instructional staff
	at-risk	"At-Risk" Process – a coordinated effort of all system departments
	HR/PL	Human Resources & Professional Learning support
	coworkers	Support from other principals and teachers in the system

interviews. The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or for clarification

throughout the interviews. They were also given an opportunity at the end of each interview to

state any thoughts or comments they had related to the topic that they felt had not been addressed

within the interview.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

Trustworthiness in research encompasses reliability, validity, generalizability, and

neutrality. Janesick (1994) reminds us that "descriptions of persons, places, and events have been

the cornerstone of qualitative research" (p. 216), and that "becoming immersed in a study

requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding

people. This is the contribution of qualitative research, and it can only enhance educational and

human services practice" (p. 216).

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research is different than reliability in quantitative research. For

quantitative researchers, reliability means that "the expectation exists that there will be

consistency in results of observations made by different researchers or the same researcher over time" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 48). However,

> in qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data. Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations. (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 48)

The researcher plays a major role in qualitative research: "the validity and reliability of the qualitative data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher" (Patton, 1990, p. 11).

Validity and Generalizability

"Validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation, and whether or not a given explanation fits a given description" (Janesick, 1994, p. 216). Patton (1990) stated that a "common concern about qualitative methods is the small sample size usually involved and the impossibility of generalizing" (p. 486).

Neutrality

A qualitative research approach can be criticized for being too subjective, "in large part because the researcher is the instrument of both data collection and data interpretation" (Patton, 1990, p. 54). Patton asserted that "a qualitative strategy includes having personal contact with and getting close to the people and situation under study" (p. 54). However, in order to conduct credible research, a researcher must "adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study. This simply means that the investigator does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths" (Patton, p. 55).

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited by the participants who were all elementary principals in a single urban school system in the state of Georgia. The participants were selected as a sample of

convenience and based on their willingness to participate, and all had 10 or fewer years experience as elementary principals. Because each of the participants was known to the researcher, the participants appeared to be relaxed and familiar during the interviews.

This study recognizes its limitations. The perspectives of the participants were limited by their own experiences in working with marginal and incompetent teachers and working through the "At-Risk" process of the Hazzard County Public Schools. The researcher did not require participants to have any specific experiences other than that of working as an elementary principal. The fact that the participants were all female was not viewed as a limitation because 76% of the elementary principals in Hazzard County were female and 24% were male.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of elementary school

principals about the issues and barriers that they face when dealing with marginal teachers. The

researcher sought to discover what elementary principals think about the work involved in

dealing with marginal teachers. The researcher also sought also to uncover the issues and barriers

that principals encounter when dealing with marginal teachers. From such a study, it is hoped to

uncover barriers within the building and with central office personnel that affect the ways in

which elementary principals work with the population of marginal teachers found in every

school. The specific research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal

   teachers?

2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own

   buildings as they work with marginal teachers?

3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with

   central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?

4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from

   central office personnel?

Qualitative interviews were conducted to gather the data from the five study participants.

The data are presented in this chapter organized around each of the four major research

questions. Data collection occurred in the fall of 2009, and the five participants were each

interviewed twice at their respective school sites. All of the interviews were conducted in the privacy of the participant's respective offices and at dates and times of each participant's choosing.

Participants were selected for their willingness to participate. All were principals in a large, urban school system in Georgia. All of the participants were female. Three of the participants were Caucasian and two were African-American. Participants' years of total educational experience ranged from 16 years to 33 years. Participants' years of experience as administrators ranged from 8 to 13 years, with a range of 4 to 10 years experience as principal.

Although the purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of elementary principals with regard to issues and barriers they have encountered when working with marginal teachers, the participants fixated their answers on incompetent teachers as much as marginal teachers. Due to the fact that the participants were unable to clearly delineate between marginal and incompetent teachers in their responses, the researcher changed the interview protocol after the first round of interviews with the participants concluded.

This chapter is organized into four major sections based around the four major research questions of the study. The first major section describes the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers. The second major section describes the issues and barriers that elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers. The third major section of this chapter describes the issues and barriers elementary principals experiences as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teachers. The fourth major section of this chapter describes the types of supports that elementary principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office

personnel. Within each major section, the responses from the five elementary principal participants are grouped and reported around common themes.

Elementary Principals' Perspectives about Working

with Marginal Teachers

The five principal participants responded to questions structured around each of the four major research questions. The first research question the study sought to answer was: What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers? In many areas related to this question, the participants had similar answers, opinions, and comments. In this section, the participants' responses are reported regarding marginal versus incompetent teachers and the difference between the two types of teachers. Respondents also discussed the differences in the types of support a principal can provide to each type of teacher. Another theme that emerged was the principals' perception of their own involvement in the support process for these teachers.

A major theme that emerged from all of the participants was that often a marginal or incompetent teacher does not perceive that there is a problem or will not admit that there is a problem, and that this stymies the entire process of improvement. One of the greatest concerns that emerged in the data was how the students involved suffer when subjected to a marginal or incompetent teacher. The prevalence of instructional issues versus classroom management issues with marginal teachers and the differences in both types of issues were also reported. Finally, the responses regarding when the participants felt termination of a teacher was the only option were explored.

Perspectives about Working with Marginal Teachers: A Glimmer of Hope

All five of the participants believed that there was a significant difference between a marginal teacher and an incompetent teacher. Linda Neal described marginal teachers as having "a perception about themselves that they are okay and they don't need to learn anything new, they are okay with the way they are doing things and nothing needs to change," whereas an incompetent teacher "had absolutely no business going into education in the first place." For Dorothy Vinson, an "incompetent teacher is one who is not coachable," while a "marginal teacher may have something that we can work with." From Sarah Moore's experiences, with "a marginal teacher, you may have fits and spurts where you see a little glimmer of hope, but with an incompetent teacher, they never get it. You just really feel that you are banging your head against the wall." Cathy Cook said, "It is hard to change a marginal teacher, because they know how to operate just within the guidelines," but

> an incompetent teacher is one who does not know subject matter. They don't know how to relate to children. They have no idea about the development of students and how they learn. They don't have a heart for children at all.

For Nancy Collins, a marginal teacher is one who is "going to do only what they have to do to get by but not go over or above and beyond." Nancy continued that an incompetent teacher is not only "not doing what she should be doing, but is impacting students in a way that is going to negatively affect them."

Marginal vs. Incompetent—Should They Stay or Should They Go?

All of the participants indicated there is a difference in the effort, work, and support that should and must be provided for a marginal teacher versus an incompetent teacher. Sarah indicated that a marginal teacher is one who has training, but "is not delivering quality instruction to the classroom." Therefore, for her, "if they are marginal, we can go in and do

some work with them" to see some improvement. She sees a chance for improvement with marginal teachers, but not for those who are incompetent. Sarah said, "If they are truly incompetent, the burden is on me to go in and do the evaluations, and then say, thank you so much, goodbye." In Sarah's experience with incompetent teachers, a principal "has worked with that person" and they "still see the same problems occurring over and over—they don't get fixed." In comparing a marginal teacher to an incompetent teacher, Sarah boils it down to the following difference: "Here is what made her marginal rather than incompetent: She knew there was a problem. She wanted to fix it."

However, the respondents did not all agree on whether it was more difficult to work with a marginal teacher or an incompetent teacher. Overall, Linda and Nancy felt the marginal teacher was more difficult to work with, while Sarah and Cathy felt the incompetent teacher was more difficult to work with. However, in several cases, the participants contradicted themselves with their own comments. For Linda, "the incompetent teacher just doesn't get it. They don't have it, so they have nothing to work with." Nancy feels the marginal teacher is "your hardest teacher to deal with. They are doing the bare minimum. The marginal teacher sees, 'I am doing my job,' so they don't see a need for improvement." Linda indicated her frustration with the situation when she stated, "There is simply no room in education for marginal teachers." In Nancy's experience, she has seen "marginal teachers working to make a change, versus the incompetent teacher, who doesn't even see what they are doing is wrong." Sarah indicated that with incompetent teachers, "you have to go to great lengths to prove incompetence." Cathy believed:

> It is more difficult to work with an incompetent teacher because you know they are incompetent but they don't know they are incompetent—they think they are okay. It is so hard for them to realize they have all these issues.

Cathy went on to say:

> I think you offer more encouragement to the marginal teacher than you do to the incompetent teacher, because the marginal teacher does have a chance to improve. The incompetent teacher is not going to improve. They're incompetent. You can't save them.

However, for Cathy, it is not easy working with either type of teacher; "Marginal teachers do not want to hear it. It is like beating your head up against a wall talking to them."

Principals must Provide Support for Marginal Teachers—"If They Fail, I Feel like I Have Failed"

Each of the five participants indicated that the school principal was where the support for a marginal teacher must begin. Sarah stated:

> It is my duty to figure out whether they are marginal. I feel like it has to be personal involvement from me, the principal. I am always putting myself in that person's shoes, trying to figure out where that person is coming from.

Sarah also shared that support from the principal can not be sporadic or random. It must be "systematic, purposeful, and intentional," because "evading and smiling and nodding your head is a lot easier for you, but it is not the right thing, because you are not doing the right thing for children."

Each of the participants shared various things they as principals do to start the support process for marginal teachers. Cathy summed up these practical activities by stating, "I model lessons, I go in and teach, I do observations, I let them watch me and then give me feedback, I co-teach with them, we look at behavior together." Linda recalled about one marginal teacher's situation, "I spent all of my time in that room. I would even go in there and teach classes myself."

The line between coach and supervisor is fine. Dorothy shared that as the principal she wants "to go in and be supportive and offer assistance and do whatever I can do. They will know

that I am not coming to lower the boom. I am coming to be supportive of their teaching."

Dorothy added that, "Ultimately, though, they know that I am the one who signs their

evaluation." Nancy shared her personal accountability for supporting her teachers when she

said, "If they fail, I feel like I have failed."

Marginal Teachers Anonymous: The First Step is to Admit that You Have a Problem

All five of the participants in the study indicated that getting teachers to actually admit or

understand that they were having a problem was very difficult. For Sarah, "Until the teacher

admits there is a problem and buys in to trying to improve, we are at a stand still." She went on

to compare it to a person admitting an addiction. Sarah explained, "It's almost like a person with

an alcohol or drug addiction, because until that person becomes aware of and admits that they

have a problem, there is not going to be a way to help them." This makes it all the more difficult

to provide support as a principal. Sarah summed up her feelings by saying, "I would rather take a

beating that than go through a situation where a teacher has a problem. It is miserable for

everyone involved."

Linda shared the same ideas. Linda explained, "Some people do not see that they are

having problems. Some people are not willing to admit to their problems. You can not change

someone who will not even admit that they have a problem." This is a serious issue when trying

to provide support to marginal teachers. Nancy stated that this is the biggest obstacle she faces as

a principal working with marginal or incompetent teachers. "When the person is not even willing

to admit that there are problems or issues, you can not help them." She stated, "You can't help

someone who doesn't realize that they need any help and who doesn't want to be helped. They

don't want help at all." Nancy shared that she worked with one incompetent teacher who "never

got it. She just didn't get it. Ever. A marginal teacher, at least, sometimes may recognize that

there is a problem." For Nancy, the biggest obstacle in supporting and working with marginal

teachers is the teacher herself, and that teacher's beliefs about their own practice. Nancy went on

to explain:

> When you have a marginal or an incompetent teacher and they truly believe that what they are doing is correct, that they don't have any issues, that what they are doing is what they need to be doing and they don't need to get any better, I think that is my biggest obstacle.

All five of the respondents indicated this was the first hurdle they had to overcome in order to be

able to work with and support a marginal teacher. Cathy recalled, "Some people do not want to

hear it. I might think they are marginal, but they think they are fine and they just do not want to

hear it." She closed her eyes and shook her head when she continued, "I swear, sometimes you

feel like you are beating your head against a wall trying to get them to understand." Cathy went

on to describe a marginal teacher with whom she had some success and saw improvement:

> She wanted to be successful. She realized she had issues, and she realized that something had to be done. She didn't want to keep feeling the way she was feeling about herself. You have to have that teacher realizing that she needs to change. It is really within the teacher.

Dorothy described incompetent teachers as, "They don't know they are incompetent. They are

not willing to listen to anything anybody has to say." She was referring to an incompetent

teacher she had worked with when she said, "She knew she was struggling, but she was not

willing, or maybe she was not able, to admit it. It was sad."

The Children are the Ones who suffer the Most—"Sacrificial Lambs"

Each of the five principals interviewed for the study indicated that their greatest concern

when working with marginal teachers was for the students in those classrooms. Dorothy

characterized them in the following way: "you have all these little babies who are sacrificial

lambs." For Sarah, "the biggest issue is for the children—I have got to make sure that the

children are safe." Whether the teacher has management issues or instructional issues, the children suffer. Susan has worked with marginal teachers who had issues in both areas and she reflected, "I had one teacher who even smacked a child. She was out of control." But even when the problems are not that glaring or dangerous, students bear the brunt of the damage, as described by Sarah in the following way: "Even when a marginal teacher realizes the problem and is making efforts to improve, the children suffer—the children always get shortchanged while we work with the teacher to improve." Cathy's concern was that "You can't ever recoup that time." When recalling a specific marginal teacher's situation, Cathy said, "Those children lost those months forever. Those students lose all that instructional time, and you can't ever get it back." Cathy stated that observing the students can help a principal determine how things are going in a classroom, and she stated, "You can tell if kids are excited about learning. You can tell if kids want to interact with the teacher, or if they are standoffish with the teacher."

Linda described a situation with a marginal teacher in a school where she herself was a teacher. Linda shared that "the students didn't even want to go to her room. I heard them talking, and I know she heard them, too. 'I don't want to go in there with her!'" Linda followed up emphatically, "Now, that is a testimony right there!" Dorothy also uses her students to gauge what is happening in her classrooms. She said, "When I walk into a classroom and I can see children are not engaged, I can see a lot of behavior problems, I can tell something is not right. You are almost always able to see it first with the kids." Dorothy remembered one situation that alerted her to a teacher who was having classroom management issues.

> The first clue I had was a little boy who started coming to the office every single day. He would come down every day with a tummy ache. I knew this little boy, and I knew this was not normal for him. He was normally a bright, happy little boy. He was bright and he liked school. Something was going on in that classroom to make him sick to his stomach every morning.

Dorothy ended up having to do some intensive classroom management interventions with his

teacher because her classroom was out of control and it was making him physically and

emotionally uncomfortable.

For Nancy, the "greatest concern is student achievement. An incompetent teacher can

truly impact achievement." When referring to one incompetent teacher she had worked with,

Nancy recalled:

> That was a very, very difficult year for me. The instruction she was giving my kids was
> wrong. Just wrong. What she was teaching them was incorrect. Parents don't want their
> children in those classrooms. We had to go back and undo a lot of what she had done.

The hardest part for Nancy in that situation was summed up in the statement, "I knew my

children were losing a year of instruction in the middle of all of it." Linda also described a

marginal teacher she had worked with like this, "The students were not engaged, they were not

learning, they were not involved. Children suffer when you are having to work with these people,

and that bothers me." It makes it more difficult when the teacher will not take any responsibility

for the issues. With one teacher, Cathy said, "She blamed it all on the kids and on their parents

and she did not take any responsibility whatsoever." When trying to support marginal teachers,

Cathy had one important question that she uses to help them gain perspective on their own

situation: "If it were your own child, would you want them to be a student in this classroom?"

Instructional Issues versus Classroom Management Issues

When asked about the prevalence of instructional problems and classroom management

problems with marginal teachers, there was some difference of opinion among the study

participant principals. Cathy reported that most of the marginal teachers she has worked with had

classroom management issues: "90% classroom management. Definitely." Dorothy had had

similar experiences; she said "a majority, and I mean a good 75 to 80%, have been management

issues." Dorothy added, "When people can not manage a classroom, it is a disaster. You have to be able to manage the learning environment." Linda indicated that management issues were directly related to instructional concerns when she said "I think if you have classroom management issues, you probably have instructional issues, too."

Nancy's concerns have been with instructional issues. She stated that where she has typically seen management issues has been with "first, second year teachers, new teachers, young teachers who are just starting out and developing their style, just beginning their careers." Sarah described her biggest frustration with instruction versus management when she talked about a marginal teacher she had worked with, saying:

> I have been in to watch her teach and according to the GOTI, she does a good job—for the 20 minutes that I am in there. But I know in my heart of hearts that she can't manage a classroom, and that affects her instruction too.

Sarah talked about a teacher who struggled with classroom management issues. She said, "This poor teacher, she knew the curriculum, and she was really trying, but it was a struggle for her to even get her kids to sit down and listen." Sarah put her hands on the sides of her head and shook it as she said, "Ahhh, her classroom was in such chaos! It didn't matter if she knew her content. It was too chaotic to teach anything!"

It's Time to Go – When is Enough, Enough?

For Nancy, it is seemingly easy to determine when it is time to stop working on improvement and start working towards termination; "Once it starts impacting safety or instruction for my kids, then I have had it, and enough is enough." However, if there were a problem, it would have to have immediately started impacting instruction for it to even be termed a problem, so this is somewhat contradictory. All of the respondents' statements to this topic were somewhat contradictory. Linda stated that for her, "enough is enough" when she "just could

not lay (her) head on the pillow at night and feel good about what was going on in that classroom anymore," yet when talking about that same teacher, she stated that it took her four years to compile enough documentation to terminate her. "I still lose sleep over what I did to those three classes of children," she said, but then went back to say, "You never know…do I get rid of them or do I work with them?" when talking about what to do about marginal teachers. Sarah worked with one teacher who hit a child. That was an immediate decision for her. This teacher "had to go. She 'smacked' a child one day," stated Sarah, "and, of course, she did not report it herself." Dorothy stated that she felt "enough was enough" when she sees "no change whatsoever." Dorothy said, "When you have talked and talked and you have been in that classroom and had people work with that person, and you don't see any change, or worse, any attempt to change, then it is time to go."

The first major research question of the study was regarding the perspectives that elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers. The respondents described marginal teachers and incompetent teachers, and ways that they worked with these teachers. The personal involvement and investment of the principals was also discussed. A major difficulty involved in working with marginal teachers was getting them to admit that they were having problems in their classrooms. There was a discussion about the concerns over students suffering when they had marginal teachers, and the difference between instructional difficulties and classroom management difficulties. Principals discussed when they had had enough and were prepared to start the procedures for termination.

Issues and Barriers Elementary Principals Experience within

Their Own Buildings

The second research question the study sought to answer was: What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers? In many areas related to this question, the participants had similar answers, opinions, and comments. Topics that were consistent among the respondents were the time, paperwork, and documentation involved in working with marginal teachers. All of the respondents also discussed the affects that marginal and incompetent teachers had on the culture and climate of their schools. Principals discussed the issue of confidentiality related to working with marginal teachers. Finally, this section reports the role that personalities and personal limitations play in working with marginal teachers.

Working with Marginal Teachers is a Long, Time Consuming Process: Principals are Busy People

All five of the respondents commented about the significant amount of time required to successfully work with marginal teachers. Sarah seemed frustrated when she stated, "Marginal and incompetent teachers can't be 'fixed' overnight!" She described one teacher with whom she worked who was marginal. She said, "It has taken several years of work, but we got to the point where good things were happening in her classroom." When asked how much time it takes to work with marginal teachers, Nancy responded, "Sometimes it is gradual, sometimes it takes a couple of years to see a real change." Cathy described the amount of time involved as one of her greatest frustrations. She vehemently said, "I hate how long the process takes. I mean, it can be a whole year before you even see any improvement, so that means that is a whole year that those children have lost." Linda echoed Cathy's thoughts when she said, "With a marginal teacher,

you do everything you can to bring them along and help them improve, but that takes quite a long time." When describing the process she uses when working with marginal teachers, Linda said, "It is a long, long, long process!" Later in her interview, she reiterated, "I mean, really, it is a long, long process."

The conflict of time demands on principals was also discussed. Cathy described how she wanted to spend as much time as she could in the classrooms with the teachers, especially those who are struggling. However, as the principal of a small elementary school that does not earn an assistant principal allotment, Cathy is a principal who has to:

> Do and deal with everything. I can't always be in the classrooms with teachers when I need to be. I am handling discipline, parent problems, special activities, system initiatives, just everything! And that is when I am actually in the building to do all those things. Don't even get me started on all of the meetings for principals out of the building!

According to Cathy, the time required to work through the process, especially the documentation and paperwork, with a marginal teacher "turns a lot of principals off." Dorothy said, "Time is the biggest barrier. Trying to get all of the things I have to do as a principal done, and trying to get this marginal person you are working with to do what they need to do, it is crazy the demands on your time." Dorothy also described the time factor as her biggest frustration when she said:

> The biggest disappointment, the biggest frustration, is that it takes all of this time and energy and effort, and in the mean time, you have all these babies who are being sacrificial lambs while you wait for this marginal teacher to get her act together. It takes so much energy and so much time to do it and do it right.

Dorothy went on to say, "You can get too much time invested in all that mess."

Paperwork: "You Have to Document, Document, Document, Document!"

All five of the respondents indicated that documentation was another frustrating and difficult, yet most important part, of the process, especially when the desired outcome of the

situation ended up being termination of the marginal teacher. Nancy discussed her difficulty in

trying to recommend a teacher for nonrenewal, saying:

> When I was going through all that, I remember someone from the central office saying to me that it is easier to get rid of a teacher who hits a child than it is to get rid of an incompetent teacher, especially when the incompetence is in the area of instruction. You have to document, document, document, document!

Linda described the amount of documentation that is required in order for a teacher to be

dismissed as "utterly ridiculous." She stated:

> It is just too difficult to get rid of bad teachers, especially after they reach tenure. If you can get them before they get those first three years in, and you have got good documentation, and I mean really good documentation, then you can do it, but otherwise, forget it!

Linda also recalled a situation where she had a marginal teacher and she was recommending

non-renewal of that teacher, but was told by central office personnel that she "just didn't have

enough documentation."

An essential part of the documentation process is the development of the Professional

Development Plan (PDP). Dorothy did mention too, that "PDPs are not just for marginal

teachers, or incompetent teachers. There are PDPs for enhancement and for exceptional

teachers." Cathy, on the other hand, only uses PDPs when working with marginal or

incompetent teachers. She stated:

> That Professional Development Plan is so emotionally charged. I think if it had a different name, then people might be more accepting of it, but as it stands now, everyone thinks a PDP means you are on your way out the door, that you are in trouble.

Linda described other types of items she collected as documentation.

> First, you have to make sure their evaluations are truthful. You have to write down what you see and be exact. Any kind of inappropriateness as far as emails that they may send to you, or other communication you may have with them, letters that they may send out to parents, or parent complaints, you need to keep all of that. Any kind of documentation that shows that the teacher is not effective in her role is important.

Linda followed up her comments about documentation with an admonition; "Seriously, the more you have, the better! When you think you have enough, you should probably document some more, just to cover yourself."

The Impact on the Climate and Culture of the School: "Is it going to be Open Warfare?"

Sarah boiled down the negative effects of marginal teachers on the culture and climate of the school to one statement. She said, "It can really eat away at the entire fabric of the school building and change the culture and climate." Sarah, however, also described the positive effects on school culture that occur when a marginal teacher makes noticeable improvements. "That is your greatest hope!" she said. Sarah continued, "The teacher making improvements and the classroom becoming a good learning environment for kids, that is what we all want, and we all celebrate it when it happens."

Marginal teachers can affect the culture and climate at the grade level or the entire school. Nancy described a situation with a marginal teacher at her school where "it was very difficult to get that person to take her share of the responsibility and help out and share the load with everyone." Nancy talked about how this affected the culture at that grade level when she said, "She didn't want to put forth the effort to do it, and then parents figured this out and parents didn't want their kids in her classroom. And believe me, in an elementary school, word travels fast." She also recalled a situation where she worked with a marginal teacher when she was a teacher in the classroom, before she became an administrator. Nancy recalled:

> As a co-worker, it was difficult hearing so many other parents and people in the school community discussing that teacher. It was difficult because you didn't want to say things that you shouldn't say because you need to support your co-workers, but on the other hand, you know that person is not doing what is best for kids or pulling her share of the load, and you certainly don't want to be in the position of having to defend her either. It really makes it hard to work together.

Often, the fact that a teacher does not fit in with the school climate and culture provides a clue to the principal that something is wrong. In addition to her walk-throughs and observations, Nancy counts on the communication she receives from parents and the school community to stay on top of situations in her school. She said:

> You can count on parents to let you know when there is a problem. With a marginal teacher, you may hear a little bit from parents, a comment here or there, but with an incompetent teacher, your phone is going to be ringing off the hook and parents are going to be up here at the school. You will hear from other teachers, too. With the marginal teacher you will hear a comment every now and then, but with an incompetent teacher you are going to have teachers coming in behind closed doors to share their concerns about their coworker.

Nancy continued her comments on the role of parents in the culture of the school as she explained:

> I think another key is parents. They will let you know when there is an issue in the classroom. They are going to let you know when there is an issue with behavior, when there are issues with instruction. You know, I have been very fortunate and I have been in some wonderful schools where the parents really, truly value their children's education, and I think that makes a big difference, too. When parents really value the education their children are receiving, they are more involved, they are going to be more in tune with what is taking place in that classroom, and if they are not pleased with the quality of the education their children are receiving, they are going to let you know about it.

No parent wants their child in the classroom of a marginal teacher, and when this is part of the culture of the school, the marginal teacher sticks out even more quickly.

With regard to school culture and climate, there is a fine line with using peers for coaching marginal teachers as well. Nancy feels that she can confidently use peer coaches and mentors with marginal teachers, but not with incompetent teachers. She stated, "With incompetent teachers, I have to completely take on that responsibility because I don't ever want to put that peer teacher or mentor in a bad position." Nancy uses those mentors and coaches in her building as role models, and she shared, "I want those teachers who are going over and above and beyond and who have incredible things going on in their classrooms to keep a good

relationship with that marginal teacher." Nancy wants to the marginal teacher to feel supported by and comfortable with the other teachers in the building.

Maintaining Confidentiality – "If the Teacher tells, which They Usually Do, I can't help That."

All of the respondents addressed the issue of confidentiality during their interviews. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the topic of marginal teachers, and personnel issues in general, confidentiality played a role at each step of the process. Sarah described when she first meets with a teacher who is having issues. Sarah said:

> I always meet with them myself, but I always have my assistant principal meet with us too. It is a confidential issue, but someone other than me needs to know what is going on. I may get hit by a bus tomorrow. My assistant principal maintains the same confidentiality that I do. But when we are having issues with a teacher, while it must be confidential, it is not going to be a secret. Confidentiality is very important, and we don't discuss it with anyone else. Now, if the teacher tells other people, which they usually do, I can't help that. But as far as I am concerned, and my assistant principal is concerned, it is a confidential issue.

Nancy recalled a situation when she was a teacher and there was another teacher at her grade level who was really having difficulty. Nancy said, "It was very difficult, because other people would ask about it, or say things, especially parents, and you didn't want to say anything that you shouldn't, but you also knew something was really wrong." Cathy explained that confidentiality can be a problem that carries over into the community of her school, because at her school "a lot of teachers also live in this community, and socialize in this community, with the parents in this community. A lot of things from school spill over."

Confidentiality can be difficult to maintain when employing the help of coaches and other building personnel in assisting and supporting a marginal or incompetent teacher. Sarah said, "The team only needs to know what they need to know, but obviously, if they are helping, they know something is going on." Nancy stated, "With an incompetent teacher, I completely take on that responsibility, because it is so sensitive, and I don't want to make it worse." I also

don't want to give that person any reason to come back at me." Linda reiterated that she also has a witness for her conversations with marginal or incompetent teachers. Linda said, "When I call them in for a conference, I always have someone in there with me. It is always good to have a witness. Someone else needs to know what was said."

Confidentiality also comes into play if a teacher ends up being non-renewed. Sarah described a situation where she had to tell a teacher that she was bring non-renewed. Sarah said, "When you sit that teacher down and tell them that they are not receiving a contract, it is a big ah-ha moment." Confidentiality comes into play because word spreads quickly in a school environment. Sarah said, "Once that teacher starts tell others that she is not going to be back, or we start looking for someone to fill her job, people figure out what is happening. You have to be very careful about maintaining confidentiality. I have had to ask myself, 'Is this going to become open warfare?'" Nancy agreed when she said, "Oh, teachers talk. Teachers are going to talk!" Linda felt that having a witness present helped to keep it more businesslike. She said, "I try to keep it businesslike, and not to make it personal, and I always have someone with me when I have those difficult conversations. It is the smart thing to do."

Personalities – There is No Class on How to be Nice

Linda felt passionately that "You have to be called to be a teacher. That is a philosophy, but I believe you have to be called. You either want to serve children or you don't. We are not all called to be teachers. I have seen people who just do not have what they needed to be a teacher." Linda described an instance with a teacher who she believed did not even like children. Even in the retelling, Linda became visibility upset about this. She placed her hands on her hips and raised her voice as she said, "I told her, 'Well, honey, you have come to the wrong profession!' It amazes me the number of people who come into teaching who do not like children." Cathy

agreed with this when she said, "If you don't have your heart in it, you can't do what is best for children." For Linda, "An incompetent teacher does not have what it takes to be in the classroom, and they should start looking for something else to do."

Sarah discussed how personalities play into the issue of marginal teaching. She said, "Lots of times marginal and incompetent teachers are simply not good at working with other people. They may be smart, and they may know curriculum, but they don't work well with teams, they don't collaborate, they don't communicate well." She added, "Frankly, I find that a lot of them are just not nice people. They are unhappy. They are miserable. That is not good for kids." Nancy recalled a teacher about whom she "got a lot of complaints. Children were just not happy in her classroom. That teacher was mean." She explained how she counseled the teacher and worked with her, and finally had to ask for some help from the Human Resources Department. "I mean," she said, "there is just not a professional learning class you can send a teacher to on how to be nice."

Principals' own limitations play a role in the process as well. Sarah described it as a learning process for her. She said:

> It is also a learning process for the principal, almost as much as it is for the struggling teacher. Especially your first year as a principal. Your first year as a principal, you are surviving too. You are not going to be able to identify those marginal or incompetent teachers, let alone provide them support until you become a more effective principal. It is a learning process for everyone.

Dorothy included her own limitations as a barrier to working with marginal teachers. Dorothy said "even my own knowledge or lack of it could be a barrier. If it is an area that I do not have any expertise in, that certainly would be a barrier."

The second major research question of the study was about the issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal

teachers. The main issues and barriers the respondents identified were the issues of time, paperwork, and documentation. The principals all discussed the impact of marginal teachers on the culture and climate of their schools. Personalities play a role in how all of these issues are handled, and the respondents discussed how the personalities of the teachers and other staff involved played a role.

<div style="text-align:center">Issues and Barriers Elementary Principals Experience with</div>

<div style="text-align:center">Central Office Personnel</div>

The third research question the study sought to answer was: What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching? All of the respondents referred to needing some type of system-wide protocol, at least for the processes and documentation involved. Participants also discussed needing additional professional development offerings for struggling teachers. Each of the principals discussed situations where marginal or incompetent teachers were moved from school to school or system to system rather than being terminated.

Protocol for Documentation – "Are We all Singing from the Same Sheet Music?"

Sarah expressed that she truly hoped that there was a plan to help teachers in place in every school in the system, but she did not know of a system-wide plan to which all principals could refer. "But," she said, "I really don't know. It is not something we as administrators have ever really talked about." She described the work of some of the building level coaches who are supported by system departments, such as the Performance Learning Coaches and the Instructional Coaches. "I think the system has done a good job coming up with the job description for these people, and supporting them, but as a principal, I have had to 'figure out' how to best use them in my building. We were not really given any guidance on that."

Sarah indicated that she had written Professional Development Plans for struggling teachers, but that she had gone to other principals for assistance in writing them, rather than to someone from the system. Sarah felt that the system did not have any written protocols for working with marginal teachers, but did think that they were coming. She stated, "I think our system is sort of on the brink of this right now. We are just beginning to get some of our processes and procedures down on paper. Thankfully, I have not been overwhelmed by it yet." When asked how Sarah knew what to do when she did discover she had a marginal teacher, she responded:

> My experience with this has been more of a learning process. But thankfully, I have been able to pick up the phone and call someone, whether another principal or a person at the system level. I just say, 'You may not the person I am supposed to call about this, but I know you and trust you and I need some help with this. I need your advice and counsel.' That has always been the way that I have handled it.

Sarah added:

> But the conversations that principals are having with one another at this point is that we need more specificity and we need more specific protocols to follow. There is too much at stake and too much that can go wrong not to at least have a basic set of guidelines or a checklist.

Cathy agreed that there was not a set protocol from the system on how to work with marginal teachers. Cathy said, "We do not have a set protocol. It is up to me as the principal. I decide what I want that teacher to work on."

Cathy felt it would be helpful, especially regarding documentation, to have some system procedures and protocols in place. Cathy elaborated:

> There needs to be a checklist of some sort, you know one called "Things to do before you go to 'At-Risk'" that details, oh, I don't know, maybe the things we all need to do before we go to 'At-Risk.' I hate getting there and being told I didn't do everything I needed to do, when I didn't know I needed to do it. That way you know you are ready and you are not wasting your time or anyone else's.

Cathy felt that this would especially help for those cases that become legal issues. "If we just had a packet of info, a checklist, samples of documentation, then we would all be doing things more the same way and it would standardize expectations in the system." Her concern was "everybody does it a different way in each building." Cathy said, "When you call another principal for help, they are doing things their own way and you are not sure if what you are doing is right. There should be a system process that we all use."

Linda felt this was a barrier as well. She described a time when she took a teacher through the "At-Risk" process because that teacher was not working up to expectations, and was told she had to obtain further documentation that the teacher was not doing her job. Linda lamented, "If there were a protocol or checklist, as least we would all be singing from the same sheet music. There would be fewer surprises. I want to do my job correctly. Just give me some guidelines."

Dorothy also indicated the need for guidelines and uniformity, especially with regard to documentation. "I would love to have someone from the system to help write Professional Development Plans. We don't have to write many, so I feel like I am not very good at it." She continued, "It would really help to have some help with documentation up front. Then we wouldn't have to try and call and get help from other principals, who are also so busy!"

How Can I Help? – You can't Send a Veteran Teacher to New Teacher Orientation

Sarah had employed the assistance of the system Behavior Specialists and Interventionists from time to time when working with marginal teachers in her building. She felt the limitation in this was they had a prescribed part of the Professional Development Plan and certain specific classroom management classes that they taught, but that was the extent of what they did to work with marginal teachers in the building. It was not specific to the teacher or the

issues the teacher was having in her classroom. It was not an individualized plan created with the

principal. Sarah also had more of concern about getting help with classroom management issues.

Susan shared:

> I feel like I have a good handle on curriculum issues, and I feel like the system is
> providing us support we need in the area of curriculum by giving us our coaches, our
> Professional Learning Coaches and our Instructional Coaches. But if you go back and
> really look at the system's professional development offerings, there is a lot of support
> and training for curriculum and instructional initiatives, but very, very little in the way of
> professional learning support for classroom management issues and behavior
> management issues, other than the one series of classroom management classes, which
> are really geared toward new, inexperienced teachers.

Sarah felt that that classroom management and behavior was the weakest area for professional

development in the system, and wondered:

> What do I do for a veteran teacher with classroom management problems? It's not like I
> can send her to New Teacher Orientation. When you have a teacher who has been
> teaching 10, 15, 20 years who is having classroom management problems, there is
> nothing for them. You are on your own as a principal to help them.

Cathy had had more success with the support of the system classroom management classes.

Cathy recently had a teacher with classroom management issues, and she attended the system

series of classroom management classes taught by the behavior specialists. Cathy stated, "This

class really helped her with her consistency specifically and her management in general.

Dorothy talked about a situation where she received assistance from the central office

that was almost too much help. She recalled "they sent people out to work with this woman.

Don't get me wrong, she was a disaster. But they came for weeks, to the point that I really

thought it was enabling. There is a point at which it becomes enabling."

Cathy had an idea about working with marginal teachers on classroom management that

she felt could be a system level initiative. She described a pool of retired system teachers who

could be called upon to work in a classroom with a teacher who was having difficulty. Cathy

said:

> I think they would be great models, and it would be a way to help the teacher and keep those students from suffering as much in the process. That is the key. With a retired teacher in the classroom working with the teacher for a prescribed period of time, the students wouldn't have to suffer. We have a lot of good retired teachers who are just sitting out there with all of that knowledge and expertise, and they could help. They don't want the day to day grind anymore, the paperwork, the stress, but they still have a lot to offer and they love children. Most of them are on the substitute list anyway. If we could use them in that capacity, I think it could be powerful.

Cathy was visibly excited when she talked about this idea. She stated that she was very interested

in pursuing it to help her teachers.

Teachers with Tenure and "Inherited" Teachers – The Dance of the Lemons

Cathy indicated that she believed the culture of our schools is designed, or had evolved to

become, a culture of trying not to fire teachers. Linda believes this is a carry over from the

influence of teachers' unions and teaching organizations. Linda said:

> I think at one point the teachers' union may have been necessary. I think a lot of times you had coaches and people like that who were put into place as administrators who did not know a whole lot about instruction. They would decide something against a teacher and they would just get rid of them if they didn't like them or whatever. But, a lot of times now, I think it is much, much too difficult to get rid of a bad teacher. I think a lot things have been put in to make it too hard. No other profession except education has the difficulty that we do getting rid of bad employees. . . .I think we can still protect teachers, but also have higher standards for them and allow them to be dismissed if need be.

Linda also said, "I really want to give every employee a chance." She shook her head and sighed

deeply when she added, "But when it starts to hurt the program or hurt the children, I need to be

able to say as the principal, 'you are not needed here any longer,' and we simply can't do that in

schools."

Each of the respondents referred to teachers they had worked with who really needed to

be doing something besides teaching. Often, these were staff members who had moved or been

moved from place to place. Sarah talked about a teacher she had to spend a great deal of time working to terminate. Sarah said, "She came to us on an administrative placement. She had had problems everywhere she had ever been. Having her as a teacher was not something I sought out. I did not hire her." Nancy also had a teacher who she had to work to terminate. Nancy recalled, "The most frustrating thing was that she was sent to me in the middle of the year and I had to take her. I didn't have a choice. She was sent to me from another school and she had been having problems there."

Cathy had one teacher who was working through the at-risk process. Cathy said things were so bad in this teacher's classroom, she videotaped it. Cathy said, "I finally just talked to her and explained outright that I was collecting documentation to have her non-renewed. I explained to her that if I finished the process, she would be non-renewed. She ended up resigning." Cathy has also seen the other end of that process; she worked in another school system prior to Hazzard County, and there was a teacher who was non-renewed in that system. But, Cathy said:

> Now she is working in this county. I had to help build the case against her in the other county to have her non-renewed, and here she is in Hazzard. Talk about the dance of the lemons! The bad teachers, the lemons, seem to dance from school to school and system to system. It is awful!"

When asked who should ultimately be responsible for supporting marginal teachers, Cathy felt that principals should be, provided that they hired the teacher who is having difficulty. "It is so frustrating that more often than not, the teachers who you have trouble with are the ones you have 'inherited.' You have to have system help with that." Linda expressed her frustration at marginal and incompetent teachers resigning and transferring rather than being terminated. "It is a little scary," she said. "If they are going to be incompetent in one school or one system, then they are going to be incompetent in another school or system."

Supports Elementary Principals Receive from

Central Office Personnel

The fourth research question the study sought to answer was: What types of supports do elementary principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel? The participants had similar answers, opinions, and comments. All of the respondents discussed the investment in time and resources that the school system and central office personnel put into the teachers. All of the participants expressed some level of frustration with scheduling and trying to coordinate with the people who could help. Coaches play a major role in this process, and the respondents all believe that the system has made great strides with its coaches and support. The Hazzard County School System has a process they call the "At-Risk" process. The respondents felt that this process and series of meetings were helpful and supportive, but they as principals still needed more guidance with the process. The Human Resources Department and Professional Learning Department provide support to principals and to teachers, in addition to functioning as participants of the At-Risk team. Finally, respondents discussed the strengths and resources they found throughout their schools and the system in the form of their peers and coworkers—other teachers and principals. These coworkers are instrumental in the process of working with and supporting marginal teachers.

Teachers are a Major Investment in Time, Money, Effort, Training -- They are "Where the Rubber meets the Road"

Sarah described what she does when she works with marginal teachers. When she becomes aware that a teacher is struggling with something or having problems in her classroom, she immediately gets a whole team at her school involved, including her grade level chairs, leadership team, assistant principal, Performance Learning Coach, Balanced Literacy Coach, and

others. Sarah stated, "The classroom teacher is where the rubber meets the road…if we are going to provide support this is where it needs to be." Dorothy felt that there is a substantial investment in teachers:

> It is really expensive to hire people and go through all that process and then just kick them out the door. I have to go every step of the way, give them every benefit of the doubt, give them every support I can before I determine that person is incompetent.

Dorothy talked about her personal investment in her teachers as well when she said, "I have invested in that person and I feel I owe it to that person to at least try and support them."

Sarah felt that the investment we make in teachers begins at the teacher preparation level. Partnerships between the system and the teacher preparation programs, whether traditional or non-traditional, need to outline a "clear understanding of expectations so we are not wasting or duplicating time and resources and training."

Part of the investment in teachers is built on relationships. Nancy felt "you have to have someone they respect, someone they will listen to. Communication is key, and the relationship you have with those individuals." She believed that respectful relationship must be a precursor to any successful investment as far as resources go. The coaches placed in the buildings, the Performance Learning Coaches and Instructional Coaches, are key components of that relationship-building and constitute a major investment on the part of the system in supporting teachers and assisting them with instruction.

Cathy felt that principals had "plenty of resources" with which to work with marginal and incompetent teachers, at least as far as resources the system could provide; unfortunately, the system cannot create time. Dorothy agreed, especially regarding money for substitute teachers and release time. "I have never had a problem getting that kind of support."

Sarah enlists the help of an entire team of people at her school, and often system personnel too, to work with any teachers who are struggling. She described the scheduling issues that come into play: "We would have to provide opportunities for that teacher to have release time out of the classroom, but that has to mesh with the time that the team can work together. It takes some strategic planning." Dorothy agreed that time and scheduling can be big barriers. Dorothy explained "trying to get all the thing done, and trying to get that person you are working with to mesh with the little time you have, it makes it take so much longer."

Coaching is the Key – Building Level Coaches and Instructional Staff are the Boots on the Ground

Even without a written system protocol, each of the participants described a similar process in their school building for assisting and supporting marginal teachers. In each of the schools, the process begins with a mentor teacher and the instructional coaches. Sarah described educators as "being good about sharing." Sarah also felt that reflection on the part of the marginal teacher during the process is also important; "I want the teacher to reflect, and to really be able to see what is going on." Nancy stated that "You kind of have to take one piece at a time with the marginal teacher, coaching them through new things and strategies." Teachers who are trained to do exactly this are Teacher Support Specialists (TSS). Sarah recalled using a TSS with one of her struggling teachers: "I knew I was going to be able to draw on her modeling and mentoring skills because she had had that training."

In addition to the TSSs at the school level, the system has trained and employed two types of coaches for each school: a Performance Learning Coach and an Instructional Coach. Sarah said that she has her coaches go in and model lessons and help with planning lessons. They can attend grade level planning meetings and assist the entire grade level or individual teachers.

At Sarah's school, she has her coaches help manage the curriculum for all of the teachers, so the teachers are familiar with them and comfortable working with them if there does end up being a reason for them to do a specific intervention with a teacher.

Nancy encourages her coaches to keep a really positive relationship with all of her teachers, so they can say, "'Hey, this is what I am doing, let me help you try it with your kids,' and they aren't met with too much resistance." Nancy went on to say that the addition of the Performance Learning Coach and Instructional Coach to her staff has been "key." Her coaches "go in and offer to help and support, provide ideas, and offer to model lessons and find materials and resources."

Linda sees her excellent teachers as peer coaches, too. When she has a teacher who is having issues, even before involving her coaches, Linda "puts that teacher in a classroom with another excellent teacher. I let her work with that teacher and observe that teacher, and that excellent peer coach starts the coaching process for us."

Dorothy felt that the principal also takes on a coaching role. She wants to help her struggling teachers be "reflective" and help determine their own process for improvement. "I sit and talk with them and ask them things like, 'Think about your classroom today. What could you have done differently? How could you have made things better for your students?'" Dorothy said that she liked to be involved in the coaching process, and felt it helped her work more as a colleague than just as a supervisor or a evaluator. Dorothy said:

> I think in terms of working with a teacher as a colleague. Sometimes it is a bit easier for them to hear what I have to say as a colleague than as an evaluator. As an administrator, when you go in that person is already intimidated to some degree, because they feel you have the upper hand.

Dorothy feels so strongly about the coaching and mentoring process that she actually assigns a mentor/coach to every new teacher in her building, even if they are not having any trouble at all.

The "At-Risk" Process – A Coordinated Effort of All System Departments

All of the participants referred to what is known in Hazzard County as the "At-Risk" process. They each described a system process for informing central office personnel about teachers in their schools who are, for whatever reason, "at-risk." This process consists of a series of individual meetings with principals and representatives of several central office departments such as professional learning, human resources, administration, student support, program for exceptional children, and teaching and learning. The attorneys for the school system are also present at these "at-risk" meetings.

Sarah believes the At-Risk process has been helpful to her and to other principals. She said:

> I think HR and others are really fine-tuning the At-Risk process and that has really helped principals keep the issue of struggling teachers on the front burner. It can't get put on the back burner any more when you have deadlines and meetings you have to attend about it. HR may not always be providing the actual support for the teachers, but I think they are providing the structure for the process. And teaching and learning and administration are all getting on board and everyone knows what is going on, and that is a really comforting thought to me. I like it when one hand knows what the other one is doing.

Cathy had a different take on the at-risk session she had attended about one of her teachers. She recalled:

> I took all of my documentation about this woman, and I even took a video of her classroom so they could see what was going on, and all of the people sitting around that table at the central office that day said, "Oh, you are going to need more documentation. You are going to have to provide her some more support." They wouldn't even look at the video I brought. I want to say, "Look for yourselves, people. It is all here on tape. You can see the problems for yourselves." But, no, they still wanted me to go back and do all that stuff with her.

Linda indicated that working through the at-risk process was helpful to her when she had a teacher who needed to be terminated. She shared, "By going to those meetings and sharing my documentation ahead of time, I felt prepared when it was time to take action. I wasn't left

wondering if I did enough in the way of documentation." Dorothy agreed that working through

the process with the at-risk team gave her confidence that she really had a case. She said:

> After those meetings, I knew I had followed the channels and had my documentation. I knew that I was following procedures in terms of making sure I had provided all the support I could and that I had given that person a chance to improve, and that it was all sufficiently documented. I didn't feel like I was on my own out there.

In another case, Dorothy used the resources of the at-risk team to help her write a PDP for a

teacher. She recalled, "I was a pretty new principal and did not have a lot of experience with

PDPs." She described sitting with all those representatives of the different departments during

her at-risk meeting. "There was a lot of expertise sitting around that table. They gave me the

ideas and suggestions I needed to be able to go back and confidently write a PDP and put it in

place for this teacher. It was very helpful."

Human Resources and Professional Learning

All of the participants had requested and received assistance with their marginal teachers

from central office personnel. Overwhelmingly, that support had come from the Human

Resources Department, and from the Professional Learning Department, which is a part of

Human Resources. For Susan, this had been helpful because she really wanted "someone from

outside the situation to observe and make sure they are seeing what I am seeing." She also

indicated that the central office staff members who have helped her have information about

assistance that is available that she may not know about.

Nancy calls on central office when she feels like she has "exhausted every avenue and

done everything I know to do to try and help that person. Sometimes it just takes a fresh set of

eyes." Cathy agreed, and felt that the support from Human Resources and Professional Learning

provided another layer of "instructional support, to make up for the specialized staff we do not

have in our buildings at the elementary level." Cathy stated that she did sometimes feel she

needed help from outside,

> Especially in the implementation of content areas and standards. I really feel like we need those content experts to come into the elementary schools and work with the teachers one on one. They can't stop by for a minute or two and keep on going, or offer one class after school one afternoon, and expect these people who don't get it to all of a sudden get it. They need some help with that. The math specialist, the language arts specialist, all these content area specialists need to come in, especially for those teachers who are struggling to deliver content effectively to their students.

Cathy indicated that she also felt the offerings from the Professional Learning Department were

generally of value. She specifically commented on the series of classroom management classes

that were offered. She said, "I have sent a couple of teachers to those classes, and seen a lot of

positive change in their classrooms."

Linda appreciates the support from Professional Learning. She shared, "I like being able

to bring in people from downtown, to have another pair of eyes and hands, to assist struggling

teachers." Dorothy also had used this resource. She recalled, "We had a situation with a TAPP

(Teacher Alternative Preparation Program) who was really struggling. I went through a lot to try

and get different people involved to get her the help she needed." Dorothy was able to assemble

a team from Professional Learning, Teaching and Learning, Human Resources, and even the

TAPP program at the local college to really provide that teacher with some intensive support. "I

was impressed with and thankful for their help. I couldn't have done it myself. They brought

some resources and expertise to the table that I just didn't have," Dorothy recalled.

We're All in This Together – Support from Other Principals and Teachers in the System

All of the principals who participated in the study indicated that working with marginal

teachers is definitely a team effort, and often the most valuable members of that team are simply

other teachers and principals. While they appreciated being able to call on central office staff, the

principals often referred to other principals throughout the system and exemplary teachers to

provide support.

Nancy indicated that she had started using those exemplary teachers in her building as

mentors before the installation of the Professional Learning Coaches and Instructional Coaches;

they have only been in the elementary schools for the past four years. Nancy said:

> The way I start the support process for a struggling teacher has changed over the past few years. Years ago before were had ICs and PLCs, I would use a mentor teacher, most likely a TSS who had been through some coaching training, to help those teachers. Now, thank goodness, we have those dedicated coaches in each school. But back then, the biggest difference was that we just had the mentor teachers and the TSSs, and those people had their own classrooms to worry about too. A lot of times they had to provide support before or after school and were not able to provide support during the actual instructional process.

Nancy then shared, "Some of the best help I get is from other principals. I can call them and

bounce ideas off of them and they have often dealt with the same thing and have some

suggestions."

Cathy stated that she believes that teachers generally do not mind helping their

colleagues. She recalled:

> As a teacher, you help your colleagues. Everyone has different strengths and you have to rely on each other to get it all done. I was a math teacher, and we would just kind of all get together and I would help other teachers who needed help, and they would help me. I think we have an allegiance to each other, so if one teacher is not doing right, we don't want to see that person fail, and we don't want it to reflect negatively on us, so we try to help them for the children.

But Cathy does believe that there is limit to that support. She shared, "I think other teachers get

really frustrated with an incompetent teacher." She saw it this way:

> If I am a first grade teacher and you are a first grade teacher, we are all responsible for the first grade students. The second grade teachers are going to look back on what we are doing in first grade and if you are not pulling your share of the load, it is a reflection on everybody. I think that teachers have much more tolerance for other teachers who are doing their jobs but who are struggling and who need some help than teachers who are just incompetent. It is a lot easier to cover for a marginal teacher than it is to cover for an

incompetent teacher, and a lot of times you have to pick up their slack. Teachers get tired of that real quick.

Dorothy commented, "I think they really see it as an indictment of all of them, not just the marginal or incompetent one. I have seen teachers really come to the rescue of a co-worker who couldn't do her job. Teachers, up to a point, will rally and help."

Cathy discussed the co-workers she would enlist to help a struggling teacher. She said, "I would offer a mentor teacher, and more importantly, release time to go into other teachers' classrooms. I think they get more out of that than anything. They need to see other teachers managing their classrooms and delivering instruction effectively." Cathy added, "You know, we really have a lot of good teachers in this system. I am not sure they are always given credit for their expertise." Linda also works with other principals and other teachers to provide support to her struggling teachers. Linda said

> I can send them to observe other classes, here and at other schools. I know other principals who do that, too. We do that for each other. We all know who our exemplary teachers are. Sometimes it is that spark of seeing a great teacher in action, sometimes that is all they need to get them going back on the right track.

Dorothy echoed this when she said, "Sometimes you just need to spend some time watching and observing in a really well-run classroom with a really effective teacher." Dorothy added, "Teachers are really so supportive of each other. They almost always welcome others into their rooms, and really give lots of time beyond their teaching. When you are at a good school, it will feel like a family, and families support each other."

The fourth major research question of the study was about the types of supports that principals receive from central office personnel with working with marginal teachers. The themes that emerged from the participants' responses included the investment of resources in teachers, the system and building coaches, the "At-Risk" process, Human Resources and

Professional Learning, and the value and expertise of peers and co-workers, other principals and

teachers, throughout the school system.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Principals bear the ultimate responsibility for the instruction that takes place in each of the classrooms in their schools; therefore, they also bear the responsibility for the quality of the teacher in each classroom. The purpose of the study was to examine the perspectives of elementary school principals about the issues and barriers that they face when dealing with marginal teachers. Five elementary principals from a single urban school system were interviewed to gain their perspectives. A qualitative and inductive approach was used to discover the perspectives of the principals with regard to working with marginal teachers and the issues and barriers they face in doing so.

The review of the related literature in Chapter 2 detailed background information and research about highly qualified teachers and accountability, marginal teaching and teacher performance, incompetent teachers, legal issues and personnel law, and the moral and ethical issues related to working with marginal teachers. These areas provided a foundation for the purpose of the study.

Summary of the Research Design

The study sought to determine the following:

1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?

2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?

3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?

4. What types of supports do principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?

This was an open-ended inductive study which used qualitative methods to gather and frame the responses of the participants. The participants were five female elementary school principals from a large, urban school system in the state of Georgia. The data were collected through a series of two semi-structured interviews with each participant. The data were then analyzed and presented thematically around the four major research questions. The researcher relied on the construct of constructivism to encourage the participants to share and to explicate their perspectives about working with marginal teachers and the issues and barriers that were present at both the building level and the central office level.

Discussion

In reviewing the literature on this subject, the researcher found three studies about various aspects of marginal teachers in the field of education. The first study to which the researcher referred was conducted by Kaye in 2004 in Alberta, Canada. Kaye's study was a mixed-method study about the experiences and perceptions of teachers when working with professional colleagues whose teaching performance was perceived to be marginal. The second study to which the researcher referred was conducted by Ehrgott, Henderson-Sparks, and Sparks in 1993 in California. This study was a quantitative study about administrators' perceptions of the scale, causes, and difficulties of marginal teachers. The third study to which the researcher referred was conducted by Tucker in 1997 in Virginia. Tucker's study was a quantitative study to assess the presence of evaluation system components that assist principals in responding to

incompetent teachers, to explore the relationship of evaluation system components and the principal's overall effectiveness rating of the evaluation system, and to explore the relationship of the evaluation system components and the incidence of administrative response to teacher incompetence.

Given that of the three studies, only one employed any qualitative methods, the researcher believed it was timely and relevant to look at the topic of marginal teachers through the constructivist lens and conduct a qualitative study. In addition, the three studies mentioned focused on teachers' perceptions about other teachers, principals' perceptions of the causes and difficulties of marginal teaching, and the evaluation of marginal teachers, respectively; thus, the present study can potentially add to the current literature by looking qualitatively at the perspectives of elementary principals regarding the issues and barriers they encounter when working with marginal teachers.

Referring to the four major research questions of the study, and based on the data collected and analyzed from the five principal respondents in Hazzard County Public Schools, the following findings are examined.

Finding 1

The greatest barrier these principals encountered in working with marginal teachers was getting them to admit that they were, in fact, having difficulties. Each of the respondents shared that they had worked with teachers who were clearly struggling but either would not or could not admit they were having any difficulty. In some cases, the marginal teacher in question did not even understand that they were having trouble. All of the principals shared the sentiment that "until that person becomes aware of and admits that they have a problem, there is not going to be a way to help them."

The frustration that all of the principals felt about this barrier is exemplified by the comment, "You feel like you are beating your head against a wall." Two of the principals compared this problem to drug or alcohol addiction. Sarah said, "It's like AA. The first step is to admit you have a problem." Sarah said that when that happens, "we are at a stand still. If they don't face reality, we are at a stand still." Linda agreed, and shared, " Before you can change you have got to admit to yourself that you need to change." Nancy added, "Change is difficult."

The respondents indicated that until and unless the teacher admits and acknowledges the problems, as administrators there is only so much they can do. They can start the coaching process, and meet with the teacher, but all felt it was rather pointless to try and begin coaching a teacher who does not acknowledge that there is a problem. Nancy summarized, "If they are not willing to listen or don't fell like that any issues, I don't see how they can be helped. The marginal teacher often doesn't even realize they are marginal." Sarah said, "They don't face reality. That is a really hard thing, maybe even an impossible thing for them to do." Linda remembered a teacher she had worked with as being "absolutely unwilling to change, to admit that she had a problem at all."

Finding 2

The greatest concern for the principals with regard to working with marginal teachers is the suffering the students endure. Each of the principals interviewed in the study indicated that their first concern was for the health, safety, well-being, and achievement of their students. The respondents indicated frustration about the fact that students suffered at the hands and actions of marginal and incompetent teachers. When there is a marginal teacher in a classroom, "the children always get shortchanged while we are working with the teacher to improve." It is not an

issue that is easily solved, either, because "students lose all that instructional time, and you can't ever get it back."

Sarah has children in the classroom of marginal teachers who are "very, very frustrated." Nancy recalled an incompetent teacher she eventually recommended for termination. She said, "I mean, we have got to make sure that all of our children and meeting standards, and this crazy woman was teaching incorrectly. What she was saying to these babies was wrong!" Linda had a similar experience. She shared, "I couldn't; sleep at night, thinking about how those children were suffering. It was, and is, a heavy load to bear."

Children can suffer whether the marginal teacher is struggling with instruction or with management. Nancy said, "There is a fine line between strong classroom management and just being mean. Some kid can shrug that off, but most can't. Especially the youngest ones." Dorothy stated about her students, "The most important thing, after their safety, is their learning. Their learning can't be sacrificed."

Finding 3

The data suggested that the greatest toll was taken on the principals personally. They were personally invested in their teachers and the outcomes of their support efforts. Although they all believed that their efforts to assist marginal teachers to be "systematic, purposeful, and intentional," they took the success or failure of each teacher very personally, and once participant shared, "If they fail, I feel like I have failed." Sarah described working with teachers, especially marginal ones, as "her toughest, but most important, duty as a principal." Sarah said that she is "always willing to put herself in that teacher's shoes" to make sure she is being fair, but said:

> At some point over the years, I have come to the realization that, as awful and distasteful as it is, I am evading the issue and hurting my children if I don't go to the teacher and let her know there is a problem. I would rather take a beating. Seriously. I would rather take a beating that have to deal with problems with marginal teachers.

Sarah alluded to the toll it takes on her personally when she said, "I really need some support myself. I need support to be able to support them." Dorothy talked about the honesty that is required in the process. "I am always very honest with them. I meet with them and make time for them. I end up doing a lot of personal counseling."

This personal involvement on the part of the principal brings about a variety of emotions. Nancy described feeling guilty because she had not taken steps with one teacher earlier. Cathy described being emotionally drained by the process. She said, "I am their support system. Seriously. For everything. It seems like they call me for everything, and tell me everything." Linda also expressed guilt. She said, "I hate to put someone out of a job. It is awful." Linda does not like to be put in the position of having "to say things that end up hurting others, even when they just have to be said." She added, "I just hate those difficult conversations. It makes me really angry that I even have to have them."

Finding 4

The principals felt the greatest assistance and support from the central office came in the form of the Performance Learning Coaches and Instructional Coaches. Although these coaches were actually school-level staff members, they were funded, trained, and supported through the central office. The respondents all mentioned these coaches as their first line of defense with marginal teachers, and appreciated the fact that they were housed in the schools to be able to create positive relationships with the teachers and work with them on day-to-day instruction and planning, and not only when there was a problem.

Sarah described the process she uses to engage her coaches with her teachers who are struggling:

The Instructional Coach and the Performance Learning Coach are already in and out of all the classrooms on a regular basis, supporting all of the teachers, so it is easy to get them to kick it up a notch with teachers who need it. In the past, I had to find other teachers on staff to mentor and coach, but they had to take care of their own classrooms, too. Now that we have these coaches, it is wonderful. It is some of the best money the system has ever spent in my opinion.

Nancy stated that her coaches "manage the curriculum piece" at her school. She added, "My coaches give me extra eyes in the classrooms, so they help me stay aware of how everyone is doing when I can't be everywhere at once."

Linda found that her coaches do not just help with the instructional piece. She said, "My coaches are really good at helping the teachers see the bigger picture. That can really be the overwhelming part of it, making it all work together, the instruction, discipline, communication, parents, new initiatives, standards, and on and on." She went on to say, "There are so, so many things that teachers have to be able to manage and incorporate to really run their classrooms well. My coaches are such a good resource."

Nancy agreed that the system support of the coaches was money well spent. She recalled:

When I started in administration there were no instructional lead teachers, no coaches in building, heck, even hardly any assistant principals. It all fell on the principal and any mentor teachers they could find in their own buildings. You needed those people to help you, but you felt guilty taking them away from their own classrooms and their own students. The coaches we have in place now are a tremendous help and a great resource for all of the teachers, not just the ones who are struggling.

Nancy summed up the feeling of all of the principals about the coaches when she shared:

If we really want to impact instruction and student achievement, we are to do that by giving classroom teachers the support they need. These coaches have been able to help provide some of that support. More than we have ever had before. You can send a teacher to all the training in the world, and you can have them read all the articles in the world, but having a coach to go in and model for them, work with them, observe and provide constructive feedback, that is really valuable.

Dorothy stated that she believes having the coaches in the building make them so much less threatening and more approachable to the teachers. "They are not afraid to ask for help anymore," said Dorothy.

Finding 5

The five principals all indicated that their greatest need from the central office was a uniform protocol for working with marginal teachers. While there is what is called the "At-Risk" process, all of the principals felt they would benefit from a system-wide written protocol to follow and written examples of paperwork and documentation. There was a general sense that each principal was "doing her own thing" and no one was sure who was "doing it right" and who was not.

When talking about the protocol she follows when working with a marginal teacher, Cathy said, "We don't have a set protocol. I have to figure it out in my building to start with. Sure, once we get to the At-Risk level, we get some guidance from central office, but a lot of times, I need help before that." Cathy suggested that even a system level checklist or packet of sample paperwork would be helpful.

Sarah agreed with Cathy. "I would hope everyone in the system is working the same basic process with these struggling teachers, but who knows?" she wondered. Sarah added:

> We do have some of the same procedures in place at most of the schools, but that is because principals talk and share, and when one principal finds something that is helpful, we share it with each other. It has not come from the system level."

Sarah also said that she tends to call other principals for help before she contacts the central office. She said, "It would be nice to know we were all sort of on the same page."

Finding 6

The researcher found in reading and coding the data, in many cases, the respondents did not directly answer the questions the researcher asked. Given the personal, confidential, and unpleasant aspects of discussing teachers who are marginal and incompetent, this is not surprising. The responses the principals gave were also often contradictory. Three of the five principals indicated in some of their answers that they had never worked with a teacher they would deem incompetent, and in other answers the same principals talked about incompetent teachers they had had to recommend for termination.

Due to the fact that the participants were unable to clearly delineate between marginal and incompetent teachers in their responses, the researcher changed the interview protocol after the first round of interviews with the participants concluded.

The researcher did ask each of the respondents to share any documents that they used or had collected in working with marginal teachers. Each of the five participants told the researcher that they did have documents, forms, and specific documentation that they would share with her, but none of the five followed up by actually sharing those documents. The researcher believes this to be due to the fact that while the respondents were extremely cooperative and willing to participate in the study, they really did not want to talk about specific teachers or share information about them.

The topic of marginal and incompetent teachers is one that is very unpleasant and caused the principals great consternation and distress. There were times during the interviews that the respondents were visibly upset by the discussing and recalling things that had happened in their schools and classrooms due to marginal teachers. The principals used characterizations like, "I would rather take a beating," "I felt like I was beating my head against the wall," "I couldn't lay

my head down on the pillow at night without thinking about it," "It was utter chaos," and "I had a stomach ache every time I thought about the students in that class" to describe some of their interactions with marginal teachers. Obviously, from the emotionally-charged responses of the participants, there is little doubt as to the difficult task that elementary principals face when working with marginal teachers.

<p style="text-align:center">Implications and Recommendations</p>

Principals

From the data, it is apparent that what works with marginal teachers to help them improve is effective, consistent, formative supervision. The situations that the participants described where they experienced success in working with marginal teachers showed that the principal could not work the process by herself, but made use of her school level team, her coaches, and the resources and support personnel available through the central office. In essence, the principals knew who to call and when to do so so that they could provide immediate support. The researcher would recommend that principals be thoroughly aware of the options and assistance available to them, regardless of the system in which they work.

Although the data indicated that the principals interviewed in this study did not have a set protocol to follow when working with marginal teachers, their answers illustrated that they do, in fact, have a basic "plan of attack." The principals also refer to each other, the other principals in the system, throughout their responses. It appears from the data that the principals are their own best resource when it comes to finding information and getting ideas. The researcher recommends that the principals continue to use and strengthen this professional network of principal colleagues, as they are often going through similar experiences and have much expertise to share with one another.

Coaches

Based on the responses shared by the five principals involved in this study, the coaches are highly valued members of the team that principals count on to intervene with marginal teachers. Coaches should take advantage of the support and follow-up they receive for their positions from the central office to be as well-trained and prepared as possible; it is apparent from the data that principals count on them and their experience and expertise.

In addition, the principals' responses made clear the fact that one of the strengths of the coaches was that the teachers in the school are already familiar with them and comfortable working with them. Coaches would do well to develop and maintain strong relationships with all of their building teachers, for two reasons. First, that level of comfort will facilitate the work between the coach and the teacher. Secondly, being familiar with and aware of the teachers and what is going on in their classrooms will assist the coach in noticing when a teacher begins to struggle with something.

Central Office Personnel

The data indicates that the principals interviewed for this study believed that for the most part, the central office of the Hazzard County Public Schools provides the needed support for principals working with marginal teachers. The data did show that the principals felt the strongest support from the central office came in the form of the Instructional Coaches and the Performance Learning Coaches. The researcher would encourage central office personnel to take this to heart and make specific and long term plans to continue to fund, train, and provide support for these coaches. It is also recommended that the system consider adding additional coaches in the elementary schools as needed. The data showed all the feedback from these five principals about the coaches was positive.

The data also showed that the principals wanted some type of uniform protocol to assist them in their work with marginal teachers. They acknowledged the "At-Risk" process as being helpful and somewhat effective, but indicated in their interviews that they needed more specific information, guidelines, and examples of documentation to give them a greater sense of efficacy with the process and equity throughout the system. The researcher recommends that the central office personnel charged with this task engage some of the principals in the development of the protocol to ensure that what is created is usable and effective.

Further Research

The participants of this study were all female elementary principals in a single large, urban school district in the state of Georgia. The researcher was aware when she began the research study that these were limitations of the study. Based on the content of the respondents' answers, the researcher believes it would be of interest and value to gather data from male elementary principals and from secondary principals, both female and male. The researcher would be interested in studying the aspect of gender and the role that the difference of gender plays in attitudes about working with marginal teachers. In addition, it would be of interest to determine if there is a difference in the way elementary principals and secondary principal deal with the issues and barriers associated with working with marginal teachers.

The researcher found one of the principal's suggestions about employing retired teachers to work in classrooms with marginal teachers who are struggling to be intriguing. Obviously, training, qualifications, and funding would be issues that would have to be addressed. However, the principal's comment about the fact that this could alleviate some of the negative affects on the students leads the researcher to believe it is worth further inquiry.

The researcher found from the data that the majority of the things the principals indicated would help them with the process were attainable things. While educators can not change the personalities of others or force people to admit their shortcomings, the practical things that the principals, such as a basic system protocol for timelines and documentation, would be fairly simple and could be implemented with some speed and ease to assist principals in working with marginal teachers.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of elementary school principals about the issues and barriers that they face when dealing with marginal teachers. The researcher sought to discover what elementary principals think about the work involved in dealing with marginal teachers. The researcher also sought also to uncover the specific issues and barriers that elementary principals encounter when dealing with marginal teachers. From such a study, it was hoped to uncover issues and barriers within the building and with central office personnel that affect the ways in which elementary principals work with marginal teachers.

As a former elementary school principal, the researcher knows first hand some of the difficulties and struggles that a principal encounters when working with marginal teachers. The data showed the emotional involvement and personal responsibility these principals have regarding their students and teachers. All of the principals interviewed referred to the students at their schools least twice in their responses as "my children," "my kids," or "my students." They clearly take their work seriously and personally.

One of the most important things that the researcher took away from this study personally was the level of expertise and care of each of the principals she interviewed. Related to this, each

of the respondents indicated in talking with the researcher that they enjoyed getting an opportunity to talk about their work with a researcher who was interested in what they were doing. This indicates to the researcher that there is clearly a need for more collaboration and professional discourse among these educators. For educators whose time is already stretched as far as it will seemingly go, this would appear to be an impossibility. However, these principals are already relying on each other for a great deal of information and support in an informal way. The data showed that these are educators who care deeply about the success of their students, and of their teachers, and who are willing to try just about anything to see that those groups of people in their care succeed.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol – Interview 1

Overall Research Questions

The proposed study is situated to examine the perspectives of elementary principals in a single school system to be able to learn the following:

1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?

2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?

3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?

4. What types of supports do elementary principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?

Interview Questions

1. How would you define a marginal teacher?

   Possible probes:
   - What qualities/behaviors/attitudes make him/her marginal?
   - What qualities does he/she need to develop?
   - How difficult – or easy – it is to change this teacher?

2. How would you define an incompetent teacher?

   Possible probes:
   - What qualities/behaviors/attitudes make him/her incompetent?
   - What qualities does he/she need to develop?
   - How difficult – or easy – it is to change this teacher?

3. What are the major differences between the two?

   Possible probes:
   - How do you tell the difference between the two?
   - Are there specific characteristics you have found with each type?

4. Have you ever worked with a teacher you considered marginal?

   Possible probes:
   - In this situation, were you a co-worker or an administrator?
   - Can you tell me about the situation?
   - What was the most difficult thing about the situation?

5. Have you ever worked with a teacher you considered incompetent?

   Possible probes:
   - In this situation were you a co-worker or an administrator?
   - Can you tell me about the situation?
   - What was the most difficult thing about the situation?

6. With whom it is usually more difficult to work: a marginal or with an incompetent teacher?

   Possible probes:
   - Why do you think this is the case?
   - Can you give me an example from your experience or work?

7. How do you tell if you have a marginal or an incompetent teacher on your staff?

   Possible probes:
   - Why do you think this is the case?
   - Can you give me an example from your work?

8. How do you approach an incompetent/marginal teacher once you discover him/her on your staff?

   Possible probes:
   - What are your ways of discovering a marginal or incompetent teacher on your staff?
   - Do you have a standard way of approaching a marginal or incompetent teacher?
   - Do you approach the teacher yourself or delegate the responsibility to someone else at the school?

- In your experience how often does a teacher admits that he/she is marginal or incompetent?

9. Is there any difference in the way you approach a marginal teacher and the way your approach an incompetent teacher?

   Possible probes:
   - Can you describe this difference?
   - Why do you think there is a difference in your approach?

10. What types of support do you offer to a marginal or an incompetent teacher?

    Possible probes:
    - Do you have a system of support for teachers established in your school?
    - Does your school have specially assigned people to work with marginal or incompetent teachers?
    - What do you personally do to support marginal or incompetent teachers?

    11. Is there anything else that I did not ask that you would like to add?

Interview Protocol – Interview 2

Overall Research Questions

The proposed study is situated to examine the perspectives of elementary principals in a single school system to be able to learn the following:

1. What are the perspectives elementary principals hold about working with marginal teachers?

2. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience within their own buildings as they work with marginal teachers?

3. What issues and barriers do elementary principals experience as they work with central office personnel in handling issues related to marginal teaching?

4. What types of supports do elementary principals working with marginal teachers receive from central office personnel?

Interview Questions

1. Is there any difference in the way you support and deal with a marginal teacher and the way you support and deal with an incompetent teacher?

   Possible probes:
   - Can you describe what you do differently in these situations?
   - Why do you handle the situations differently?

2. Who do you involve in working with marginal or incompetent teachers?

   Possible probes:
   - Do you take the responsibility to work with these teachers?
   - Who else in your school is involved?
   - Do you have people on your staff who are constantly working with marginal or incompetent teachers?
   - How do you choose people from your staff to work with marginal or incompetent teachers?
   - Do you involve anyone outside of the school/from the central office when working with marginal or incompetent teachers?

3. What professional learning activities do you offer to marginal or incompetent teachers?

   Possible probes:
   - What types of professional learning activities do you offer to marginal or incompetent teachers on a regular basis?
   - Do you offer different activities for different people?
   - Does your school have a written professional development plan for teachers?
   - Do you offer different professional learning activities for marginal and incompetent teachers?

4. How do you monitor the progress of a marginal or incompetent teacher?

   Possible probes:
   - Does your school have a structure to monitor the progress of a marginal or incompetent teacher?
   - Who is responsible for this monitoring?
   - What is your job in this process?
   - Do you offer any kind of incentives to those teachers who make progress?

5. What barriers (institutional, policy, procedural, personal) do you experience working with marginal/incompetent teachers?

   Possible probes:
   - What barriers on a personal level have you experienced working with marginal or incompetent teachers?
   - What institutional barriers did you have to overcome dealing with marginal or incompetent teachers?
   - Have you ever faced any procedural barriers in your work with marginal or incompetent teachers?
   - What policies were in your way of dealing effectively with marginal or incompetent teachers?

6. When do you decide that enough is too much and initiate the dismissal process?
   Possible probes:
   - When do you decide to give up and recommend the dismissal of a marginal or incompetent teacher?
   - What procedure do you follow to fire such teacher?
   - Have you ever had legal issues with firing a marginal or incompetent teacher? If so, how did you deal with them?

- How often have you had to recommend the firing of a marginal or incompetent teacher?

7. From your practice, what was your biggest disappointment in dealing with a marginal or an incompetent teacher?

   Possible probes:
   - What were the teacher's major issues?
   - Why would you call this example "a disappointment"?
   - Why it did not work?
   - If you had an opportunity to change anything you tried with that person, what would you change? Why/why not?

8. From your practice, what was your biggest success dealing with a marginal or an incompetent teacher?

   Possible probes:
   - What were the teacher's major issues?
   - Why would you call this example "a success"?
   - Why it did work?
   - If you had an opportunity to change anything you tried with that person, what would you change? Why/why not?

9. What are the components of success working with a marginal or an incompetent teacher?

   Possible probes:
   - Why do you think these components helped with your success in this situation?

10. If you could ask for any help to assist you in dealing with a marginal or incompetent teacher, what would you ask for?

    Possible probes:
    - Whose support would you value the most?
    - Do you think you need additional resources? Is so, which ones?

11. Who should be responsible for supporting marginal and incompetent teachers? And for dismissing them?

> *Possible probes:*
> - Why? What would be the legal implications?
> - Do you think there would be any institutional, policy, or personal barriers to this change?

12. What are the major issues other than those you have already mentioned that you have experienced in working with marginal or incompetent teachers in your school?

13. Is there anything else that I did not ask that you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Principals Perspectives of Barriers to Dealing with Marginal and Incompetent Teachers

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study entitled "Principals Perspectives of Barriers to Dealing with Marginal and Incompetent Teachers." This research is being conducted by Kelly Nagle Causey (doctoral student, University of Georgia, Program of Educational Leadership, xxx-xxx-xxxx) under the direction of Dr. Sally J. Zepeda (University of Georgia, Department of Educational Administration and Policy, xxx-xxx-xxxx). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason and without penalty of loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to investigate the perspectives of elementary school principals with respect to the barriers they encounter when dealing with marginal and incompetent teachers. This research may enhance principals' development throughout the PK-12 educational community. Given that this field of study is in its infancy and abuts with increased calls for accountability related to the "highly qualified" section of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), more schools and their personnel might be able to gain valuable insights from the results of this study.

I may benefit from this study by becoming aware of my own practice, which will, in turn, assist me in becoming a better leader.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I may be asked to do the following things:

1) Be personally interviewed three times, with each audio-taped session lasting a maximum of an hour.
2) Answer via telephone or email any follow-up questions that co-investigators may have.
3) Review interview transcripts and findings for accuracy.

I will not receive any monetary compensation for participation in this study. Any compensation I receive is in the form of perceived benefit from possible feedback and insight gained by reviewing the said recordings.

There are no foreseeable risks of this research. The study will include four participants. Participants will be provided pseudonyms, and all persons or places to which they refer will be pseudonymized. Where details might allow outsiders to intuit identities, such details will be removed or changed. Interviews will be transcribed by the co-investigator, thus ensuring confidentiality. Records of participant names will be kept in a separate file from any other documents.

Information collected will be stored in a secure, locked location. Unless required by law, no individually identifiable information about me will be publicly disseminated. The tapes will be securely stored in a locked file at Kelly Causey's home, will be available to the investigator and her advisor only, and will be destroyed after five years by erasing with magnetic strips all contents of the tapes.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project (xxx-xxx-xxxx).

I understand that, by signing this form, I am agreeing to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this form for my records.

Name of Researcher: Kelly Nagle Causey   Signature: Date:
Telephone: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Email: xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx   _____   _____

Name of Subject: Signature: Date:

_____   _____   _____

For questions or problems about your rights as a research participant please call or write: The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia, 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-mail Address IRB@uga.edu .