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School Principals' Sources of Knowledge

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Arland Early Perkins

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Dr. Eric Glover, Chair

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Dr. Virginia Foley

Dr. Pam Scott

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ABSTRACT

School Principals' Sources of Knowledge

by

Arland Early Perkins

The purpose of this study was to determine what sources of professional knowledge are available to principals in 1 rural East Tennessee school district. Qualitative research methods were applied to gain an understanding of what sources of knowledge are used by school principals in 1 rural East Tennessee school district and the barriers they face to using knowledge sources. This study questioned whether these resources are adequate for, accessible to, and used by school principals. In this study I examined principals' perceptions of the need for a district-led mentoring program.

The study first consisted of a preliminary data collection procedure. Ten of the school district's principals completed a demographic questionnaire and list of survey questions developed from the 4 research questions and elements of the literature review. These data were reviewed by the researcher in order to categorize the respondents' responses into meaningful demographic data.

The final data collection procedure involved 6 principals chosen to complete face-to-face interviews consisting of open-ended questions developed from an initial interview protocol.

Results indicated the principals' examples of seeking knowledge and information from data sources, collegial professionalism, readings of research and literature, and professional development. The principals presented evidence that they embrace teaching and learning within their roles as school principals. The 2 areas on which the principals focused their concerns were time and the current state department educational reforms. The principals provided recommendations for a future district-wide principal mentoring program.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my loving family: To my wife Fonda, thank you for your patience in my pursuit of the doctorate degree. To my children Dustin and Hannah, thanks for your support and encouragement. I also want to express love and appreciation in memory of my parents who instilled in me the gifts of determination and perseverance that have allowed me to overcome many obstacles in life and never give up. Through this long process I have frequently thought of them and their spirit has helped me tremendously especially at times when I considered quitting.

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I also want express my appreciation to all the participants of my study. The study would not have been possible without you. I want to recognize my friends who continually supported and encouraged me through this process. I extend the upmost thanks to Jesus Christ who always helps me along life's journey and through his grace made this possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“To be effective instructional leaders who work well with people, create a collegial environment, and use data to drive decisions, new and experienced principals need coaching in those specific skills.” (Duncan & Scott, 2010, p. 306)

During a November 2007 meeting I witnessed a veteran principal discuss the new principals’ cohort that is required through the Tennessee Department of Education. Principal Danny Redmond stated:

I was registered for the wrong cohort group in Knoxville. Shortly after arriving and talking to the presenter I realized that I was at a beginning principals training, but since I was already there and the presenter over the training said that I could participate and get TASL credit that I needed, I decided to follow through with the 2-year program. The program helped me be a more effective principal. The members of my group, my mentor principal, and the training sessions provided knowledge and support that I never received in my 25 plus years in the principalship; it’s all about our accountability and being an effective leader with the emphasis on instruction. (D. Redmond, personal communication, November, 2007)

This discussion with a colleague inspired my interest in the study of school principals’ knowledge sources including principal mentoring and coaching for new and veteran principals alike.

A 1970 U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity stated, “In many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. He or she is the person responsible for all activities that occur in and around the school building” (p. 56).

Currently Tennessee school principals are facing a new era of accountability with changing roles and responsibilities. The demands placed on public school principals have increased dramatically over the past few years due to federal and state educational reforms aimed at increasing student achievement and principal effectiveness. Concerns of principals regarding

the principalship in Tennessee include mandates from both federal and state reform legislation. These mandates include No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2010), Race To The Top (Race to the Top [RTTT], 2011), and Tennessee's First To The Top (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011).

According to a 2011 Tennessee Commissioner's Memo, of approximately 200 principals hired each year over 45% of new principals were former assistant principals and 91% of principals worked in Tennessee immediately prior to assuming leadership (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011). With approximately 200 new principals hired each year in the state, this may suggest a need for support structures for these principals.

The need for principal mentoring is not new. Lashway (as cited in Holloway, 2004, p. 87) concluded that, "By all accounts, new administrators experience intense, unrelenting stress as they try to adjust their textbook understanding of leadership to the real world of practice." Redmond (2007) discussed the need for principal coaching for both new and veteran principals. Redmond stated, "Professionals in the school leadership community understand the need for continuous professional development and mentoring; however, for school leaders to strive to be effective they need extensive exposure to sources of professional and leadership knowledge" (D. Redmond, personal communication, November, 2007).

Concerning the preparation and development of school leaders, Levine (2005) in the report *Educating School Leaders* stated that "the job of school leader has been transformed by extraordinary economic, demographic, technological, and global change. Principals and superintendents no longer serve primarily as supervisors. They are being called on to lead in the redesign of their schools and systems" (p. 11-12). Levine stated that "few of today's 250,000 school leaders are prepared to carry out this agenda. Neither they nor the programs that prepared

them should be faulted for this. Put simply, they were appointed to and educated for jobs that do not exist any longer” (p. 12). It is no wonder that so much attention is given to the school principal’s leadership and professional knowledge as the foundation for the development and perseverance of an effective school.

Statement of the Problem

Substantial literature supports the need for new and veteran principals to obtain appropriate leadership knowledge. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) stated that “the school leader’s ability to select the right work is a critical aspect of effective leadership” (p. 97). They identified 11 factors that compose “what works in schools.” If school principals are to be effective school leaders, they need access to and use of specific knowledge sources.

Marzano et al. (2005) identified the 11 factors as: guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals and effective feedback, parent and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, collegiality and professionalism, instructional strategies, classroom management, classroom curriculum design, home environment, learned intelligence and background knowledge, and motivation. Currently new and veteran school principals face issues for which they were not prepared by their school leader preparation programs in the university setting. As Levine (2005) stated, “A growing number of education schools are lowering admission standards, watering down programs, and offering quickie degrees” (p. 24). If Levine’s statement has some merit, it is necessary that this country’s school principals have access to sources of knowledge that include the ‘right work’ factors that Marzano et al. discussed.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of what sources of knowledge are used by school principals in one rural East Tennessee school district and the barriers they face to using knowledge sources. There are various general knowledge sources available to school

principals. However, in this study I questioned whether these resources are adequate for, accessible to, and used by school principals. This study involves questions about principals' perceptions of the need for a district-led mentoring program.

Research Questions

In this study I examined the perceptions of the principals in one Tennessee school district regarding their valuing of, access to, and use of professional knowledge. I also accessed the principals' perceptions regarding the value of a district-led mentoring program. Research questions used to guide this study were:

1. What do principals in this school district consider as professional knowledge?
2. What interfered with or limits these principals' ability to use professional knowledge?
3. What supports or extends the principals' ability to acquire and use professional knowledge?
4. What are the principals' perceptions of the need for a district-led formal mentoring program in order to be a more effective school leader?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the sources of knowledge that are available to school principals, learn how principals acquire and use professional knowledge, and assess their perception of the value of a potential mentoring program. There is a growing awareness among policy makers that every school needs an effective leader. This study addresses the processes used by principals to continue developing their ability to lead by examining their professional knowledge acquisition and use. Tennessee's Governor Haslam has stated, "A successful school has a great principal leading it and great teachers in the classroom. We want to ensure that every Tennessee principal and educator has the

tools and supportive environment necessary to be effective in the classroom and in their schools” (TellTennessee.org, 2011). This study may open up a broader dialogue between school committee leaders in the development of a proposed district-led school principal mentoring program.

I am currently serving my eighth year in the role of school principal. I understand the need for the professional knowledge essential to ensure that I provide appropriate and effective instructional leadership. During the fall of 2005 I assumed the role of principal in an elementary school in rural East Tennessee. I vividly recall my ignorance and the lack of support I needed to refine and improve my development and performance as a school leader. This experience spurred me to continue my education and obtain an educational specialist degree, pursue the education doctorate degree, research principal mentoring, continue reading educational leadership literature, and attend state, regional, and national professional development seminars and institutes. This exposure to various sources of knowledge and mentoring through the internship program at East Tennessee State University has provided a base of knowledge I needed to succeed. I was able to see firsthand the need for this study as a way to provide the support that my district colleagues need in order to achieve a higher level of effectiveness in their roles as principals. This study may provide valuable data that can be used in the development of a district-wide mentoring program that could provide practicing principals professional support in their school leader role.

Scope of the Study

This study was limited to an examination of six interviewees. It was not intended to be a comprehensive study of all sources of knowledge in Tennessee or the region; rather, it is a snapshot of the sources of knowledge that are used by the principals of one rural East Tennessee

school district, the barriers the principals face when using those sources of knowledge, and the principals' perceptions of the need for a district-led principal mentoring program.

Procedures

In this study I addressed the research questions above by using qualitative methods. I invited 10 principals to participate in interviews. I conducted interviews with six principals from leading schools from grades kindergarten through high school who agreed to participate. The study took place in one East Tennessee School District. The purpose of these interviews was to gather perceptions and viewpoints regarding knowledge needs of principals and the potential value of a formal principal-mentoring program.

Statement of Research Bias

Despite my best intentions, this study may reflect my personal bias. The results may be colored by my position as a principal in the district studied. However, my relationship with the study also provides me the opportunity for a deeper understanding and analysis of the data.

Definitions of Terms

Effective Leadership refers to two central assumptions that guide effective school leadership: 1) teaching and learning are the fundamental missions of the school, and 2) the improvement of teaching and learning is never-ending (Leithwood & Duke, 1998).

Specific Knowledge Sets Principals Need refers to teaching, learning, management, and leadership (Bechtel, 2007).

Mentor refers to a person of seniority in the principalship who will advise, train, offer tips, and suggestions to the mentee (Weingartner, 2002).

Mentee refers to the one who receives advice, training, tips, and suggestions from the mentor (Weingartner, 2002).

School principals refers to the school administrators who are classified as principals who serve schools with grade levels kindergarten to 12th grade in one rural East Tennessee School District.

Coaching refers to the act of mentoring (Duncan & Scott, 2010).

Professional Knowledge refers to the application and implementation of problem-solving skills in organizations. It directly influences a leader's capacity to define complex organizational problems and attempts to solve them (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000).

Sources of Knowledge refers to information that guides school principals' decision-making processes such as experience, networking, books, journals, professional development conferences, data, mentoring, and other sources (Bechtel, 2007).

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 describes the rationale for the study and includes the statement of the problem, the research questions, and the significance and scope of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of literature examining potential sources of knowledge available to Tennessee school principals with an assessment of possible barriers they face using those sources of knowledge and examines mentoring practices that may be available for principals in this district. Chapter 3 consists of the methodologies and procedures used to gather data and includes ethical protocol data sources and data collection. Chapter 4 reports the data collections and findings. Chapter 5 reflects conclusions, summary, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“When a school principal fails, it comes at great social cost to the school’s students and families, at significant economic and often political cost to the school district, and at an extreme personal cost to the principal. A failed principalship destabilizes the school and often disrupts the school district and community. Furthermore early-career principals who are unsuccessful are frequently lost to the profession forever” said Knuth and Banks

-- Knuth and Banks (NASSP Bulletin March 2006, p. 4)

The role of the public school principal in Tennessee is evolving. A common theme in current educational leadership literature refers to the school principal’s effectiveness as related to student achievement. This literature review is an examination of the sources of knowledge that are available to and used by school principals. Fullen (2002) stated:

The role of the principal as instructional leader has taken us only so far in the quest for continual school improvement. We must now raise our sights and focus on principals as leaders in a culture of change. School improvement depends on principals who can foster the conditions necessary for sustained education reform in a complex, rapidly changing society. Never has the time been riper for change leaders than right now. (p. 20)

The purpose of this study is to provide a qualitative analysis of the sources of knowledge that are available to school principals in one rural East Tennessee school district. In this chapter I examine the potential knowledge sources that might be available to principals.

Knowledge

Northouse (2007) examined the work of Mumford et al. and concluded, “that knowledge is inextricably related to the application and implementation of problem solving skills in organizations. It directly influences a leader’s capacity to define complex organizational problems and to attempt to solve them” (p. 47). Bellinger, Castro, and Mills (2004) reported

research related to the human mind. According to Ackoff(1989) the content of the human mind can be classified into five categories:

1. Data: symbols,
2. Information: data that are processed to be useful; provides answers to “who,” “what,” “where,” and “when” questions,
3. Knowledge: application of data and information; answers “how” questions,
4. Understanding: appreciation of “why,” and
5. Wisdom: evaluated understanding. (p. 3-9)

Ackoff’s conceptual framework provides a helpful tool for understanding how knowledge relates to the school leaders’ ability to make informed decisions. Wisdom represents the top of the hierarchy, and one can discern that the accumulation of knowledge (learning) leads to wisdom. The knowledge base in regard to schooling, teaching, and education are aligned with school principals’ pursuit of professional knowledge. This affords the principal wisdom and experience to make informed decisions, and the principal’s knowledge affects the leadership and management of the school. Northouse (2007) stated, “Knowledge has a positive impact on how leaders engage in problem solving. It is knowledge and expertise that make it possible for people to think about complex system issues and identify possible strategies for appropriate change” (p. 48).

Tacit knowledge has been examined in several articles and studies as related to school administration and leadership. Sternberg (2007) discussed tacit knowledge as related to intelligence saying, “An important part of practical intelligence is tacit knowledge, or having the procedural knowledge to handle everyday life situations that typically is not formally taught in schools or other institutions” (p. 38). Many school principals who possess the ability to resolve

effectively the daily school situations that arise with positive results possess tacit knowledge.

Polanyi (1966) said, “Tacit knowing is shown to account (1) for a valid knowledge of a problem, (2) for the scientist’s capacity to pursue it, guided by his sense of approaching the yet determined implications of the discovery arrived at in the end” (p. 24).

Wisdom

Wisdom is a direct result of the expansion of one’s knowledge base. Sternberg (2001)

defined wisdom as:

The application of tacit as well as explicit knowledge as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balance among (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) extrapersonal interests over the (a) short term, and (b) long term to achieve a balance among (a) adaptation to existing environments, (b) shaping of existing environments, and (c) selection of new environments. (p.227)

Sternberg correlated his wisdom theory to apply within educational settings. His work correlates to the individual school principal’s development with the acquisition of professional knowledge. An increase in wisdom can occur as school principals increase their professional knowledge base. Sternberg (2001) discussed the connection between tacit knowledge and wisdom. He stated, “Thus, wisdom is a kind of practical intelligence in that it draws on tacit knowledge, but it is not just any kind of practical intelligence” (p.231). Sternberg’s theory can provide an understanding of the process as school principals gain tacit knowledge through various knowledge sources that could lead to an attainment of wisdom for the school principal.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are key elements to the study of principals’ sources of knowledge. Hargreaves (1996) stated, “What matters, rather, is that the knowledge that might transform teaching and learning in positive ways should itself be transformed in how it gets produced and disseminated” (p. 120). Hargreaves’s statement is valid when one considers how student and

adult learning have shifted to more interactive, project centered, and technologically influenced activities. Hargreaves and Fullen (2000) stated, “What’s ‘out there’ is now ‘in here’ and this has fundamental implications for teachers and administrators” (p. 52). School principals face strict accountability standards and seek to lead diverse schools in order to meet student achievement guidelines set forth by local, state, and federal public school laws.

Leadership and Management

The focus of preparation programs, new principal mentoring, and professional development for veteran principals centers on the development of effective leadership practices. Scholarly literature looks at the strategies leaders employ in order to achieve high student achievement. Some of the literature pertaining to school principals’ knowledge, leadership, and effectiveness have one key component – that of effectiveness as determined by student achievement. The Mid Continent Educational Leadership laboratory (MCREL) as a product of a meta-analysis of leadership studies created a Balanced Framework (McNulty & Bailey, 2004). In this framework the 13th of 21 categories of leadership responsibility was Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. Components of the school principal’s responsibility include the following:

1. Is knowledgeable about curriculum and instructional practices,
2. Is knowledgeable about assessment practices, and
3. Provides conceptual guidance for teachers regarding effective classroom practices.

(McNulty & Bailey, 2004, p. 41)

Northouse (2007) stated, “Leadership and management are different concepts that overlap. They are different in that management traditionally focuses on the activities of planning, organizing, staffing, and controlling, whereas leadership emphasizes the general influence

process” (p. 13). School principals who instill and pursue a high degree of professionalism provide the framework to nurture a positive educational experience for students, teachers, and administrators alike. In an interview with Brandt (1992) Sergiovanni discussed his five sources of authority and answered the question, “You can’t abandon hierarchical leadership entirely, can you” (p. 49)?

Sergiovanni’s (2006) work takes the literature on leadership and management to a deeper level of understanding the synthesis of both leadership and management. He said:

No, there are five sources of authority, not three. You’ve still got bureaucratic, psychological, and technical-rational – but competence and virtue should dominate, I think; the other three should supplement. You fall back on hierarchical authority and psychological leadership because the world is imperfect. But if you’re really a professional – there’s something antithetical, isn’t there, between the notions of professionalism and leadership?” (p. 6)

This theory may prove invaluable to the principal’s practice to nurture professionalism in his or her pursuit of knowledge. Sergiovanni (2006) stated, “The more professionalism is thriving, the less there is need for leadership” (p. 6).

Research over the past 30 years suggests that sources of knowledge are available to school principals. According to Bechtel (2007), “Data, books, conference attendance, electronic sources, and resource personnel were the most frequently mentioned knowledge sources by the elementary school principals” (p. 118). This literature review by Bechtel (2007) revealed that data, literature and research, professional development, mentoring and coaching, electronic resources, and resource personnel were the most common sources of knowledge used by school principals spanning the last 30 years. However, a substantial portion of Bechtel’s literature review regarding sources of knowledge available to school principals is mostly in connection with the aspect of effective leadership practices.

The research question that was used to guide my literature review asked, “What are the sources of knowledge available to and used by school principals?” Each of those knowledge sources is discussed in the following section.

Sources of Knowledge

Research and Literature

A vast base of scholarly research on increasing student achievement including instruction, data analysis, and curriculum effectiveness is available to assist the school principal’s decision-making process. The sources of knowledge contained within educational research and literature are generally not well used by school leaders. Levin (2010) stated, “The primary argument for the importance of greater use of research in education rests on its potential efficacy in improving student outcomes” (p. 304).

How school principals attain, disseminate, and implement research information in order to meet their specific professional knowledge needs has been widely discussed in several studies. The issue regarding use of research materials as sources of knowledge were studied by Biddle and Saha (2002) who stated, “Many critics have claimed that education research has little or no impact because potential users in the education community do not value such research” (p. 73). Biddle and Saha (2002) discussed criticisms of educational research as viewed by school leaders saying:

The results of our study raise serious questions about claims that research knowledge has minimal effects on policies and practices in schools. At least when it comes to principals, our results suggest that most school leaders view research knowledge positively, are regularly exposed to information about research, retain a good deal of that information, and actively help their schools use that knowledge.” (p. 77)

They concluded:

1. Most principals hold positive opinions about education research.
2. Most principals are actively interested in education research that is relevant to their professional needs.
3. Most principals are at least minimally familiar with a wide range of education research topics.
4. Most principals are regularly exposed to information sources that present knowledge from research.
5. Most principals learn about education research from these information sources.
6. Most principals believe that research knowledge plays an active role in policy decisions and instructional practice in their schools. (Biddle & Saha, 2002, p. 73-75)

Within the literature review process are conflicting findings regarding school principals implementing research into their professional practice. The literature revealed that scholars encouraged principals to use research findings to improve their specific professional needs and the needs of their respective schools. Levin (2010) stated:

The key points from this analysis are that formal research in education has a greater contribution to make than is presently occurring, that there is no contradiction (and indeed there is a considerable synergy) between greater attention to research and teaching as a professional activity, that knowledge mobilization is primarily a social and organizational process, that educational leaders can contribute to this effort through some relatively simple steps. (p. 313)

Primary and secondary sources of knowledge that are readily available for use by school principals include journals, books, and on-line educational resources. Biddle and Saha (2002) found:

Research knowledge is disseminated through three kinds of sources: primary sources such as those used by investigators when they share research knowledge with colleagues in their fields, secondary sources such as those which provide reports of research knowledge for potential users, and tertiary sources: such as those which interpret research knowledge for the general public.” (p. 75)

Biddle and Saha (2002) stated, “Our results suggest that most principals gain the bulk of their information about research knowledge from secondary sources” (p. 75). Journals and professional books are the most common secondary sources of research knowledge acquired by principals according to Biddle and Saha (2006).

Understanding and Applying Data

Data-driven decision making is a cornerstone component of Tennessee’s First To The Top initiative according to the state’s Department of Education website (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011). Ezzani (2009) stated:

Data driven decision making has become part and parcel of an era of K-12 educational accountability based on mandates by the federal and state governments. Invariably, this has resulted in a heightened level of accountability at the school district level. There is an expectation for district leaders to have the knowledge and skills to recognize and implement all the modalities necessary to meet the pressures of performance-based accountability to increase the quality of public education for all students. (p. 159)

According to Tennessee’s First To The Top website, “A comprehensive reform agenda leverages the belief that rigorous standards and assessments, great teaching and educational leadership, and high-quality data systems must work in concert to improve academic achievement (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011). How will this reform agenda affect Tennessee school principals’ accountability? Within the FTTT Tennessee mandates teachers and principals to be trained:

. . . through focused professional development which will support their ability to maximize use of value-added data to improve instruction for students. The program will support teachers and school leaders in the use of balanced assessments to determine how best to help students learn. Using data from this approach to inform instruction throughout the school year – as opposed to waiting for the results of annual assessments – can lead to better student learning.” (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011)

These recent reforms clearly define the importance of data-driven decisions by school principals.

Sources of knowledge within data-driven decision making rests on the professional development of both principals and teachers who must incorporate the valuation and implementation of student data findings into daily instruction from various sources such as Tennessee Value Added Assessment System, Tennessee Comprehensive Achievement Program, and student progress monitoring through the use of formative assessment. According to the Tennessee State Department of Education (2013), the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) and the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) are statewide measures of student achievement. The TVAAS is a statistical analysis of achievement data that reveals growth over time for students and groups of students such as those in a grade level or in a school. The TCAP is a set of statewide assessments given in Tennessee to measure students' skills and progress (Tennessee Department of Education, n.d.).

According to the Lexington City Schools website (2012) formative assessment means checking for learning to identify who has met the target goal and who needs more intensive help and practice in understanding. Formative assessment is ongoing all year and is given not to produce a grade but to gain information and identify what the student needs next in order to differentiate instruction (Lexington City Schools, 2012). Fullen (2002) reinforced the importance for principals to have adequate access and training on data sources of knowledge, "Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement" (p. 16).

Tennessee principals are expected to become highly proficient and knowledgeable of the data systems' assessment findings and to make instructional and curricular changes and improvements in order to achieve improved student scores that will satisfy state benchmarks. In Tennessee these specific resources are widely available for school principals to use. The State

Department of Education has established a large content of electronic sources as well as professional development sessions in order for principals and teachers to have adequate access and training in order to study data sources of knowledge. These resources include websites, portals (restricted) for individual authorized school and district access, webinars, and statewide training sessions that provide access to various reports of student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and training resources. Sanders and Horn (1998) stated:

Assessment systems of appropriate tests and methodologies for analyzing them are now available. It is through these new assessment systems that take into account the impact of educational experiences in the school and in the individual classroom that the promise of effective education for all students can come closer to realization.” (p. 256)

Data sources of knowledge will continue to evolve due to Tennessee Commissioner of Education Kevin Huffman and Governor Bill Haslam’s education reform efforts. With Tennessee educational leaders applying for and receiving a waiver from the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) mandates, a greater focus is placed on data of not only student performance but teacher and principal performance through the framework of the newly implemented Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model. During a recent interview pertaining to the Tennessee Department of Education’s partnership with Harvard University and education nonprofit Education Pioneers work to transform its data systems Commissioner Huffman stated, “Improving the way we get data back into the hands of teachers and district leaders is one of my key strategic priorities for this department, and all of these projects support that goal” (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011).

Data sources including student, school, and district data are key sources of information that principals have to interpret, analyze, and evaluate in order to make instructional and curricular decisions. The abundance of data and the pressure to study student achievement data effectively force school principals to be the “experts” in data study. School principals can easily

feel overwhelmed because of the data and a need for knowledge about how to interpret and use them.

To use data the principal must first have knowledge to access the data sources and then collaborate within “data teams” in order to make data-based instructional decisions. Irvin and White (2004) stated:

The most influential role for the principal is to assume the role of questioner and use data as a tool. Facilitative questioning drives school improvement and helps stakeholders understand the current situation and move the school from undertaking uncoordinated improvement efforts to creating a comprehensive plan to educate students to their academic potential.” (p. 22)

Professional Development

The role of professional development in the principalship is a key factor in the overall effectiveness of the school principal. Professional development plays an instrumental role in school improvement efforts especially in overall student achievement. Haar (2004) stated, “The responsibility to lead rather than manage a school is an enormous yet challenging responsibility. In order to meet these challenges, principals need quality professional development” (p. 20).

When reviewing professional development practices an evaluation of the program can determine the goals and objectives of the specific professional development program. School principals who strive to be effective school leaders can promote their leadership training by seeking professional development devoted to the areas of school leadership. According to Eric Glover:

A determination between the potential leadership benefits and/or management characteristics can provide the principal with information to emulate the programs that lend themselves to school management. Leadership causes a change in the movement of people in contrast to that of management which maintains the status quo. Management is an idea that came out of the machine age. (E. Glover, personal communication, January, 2013)

Taylor's (1911) theory of scientific management analyzed and synthesized workflows in the workplace. This is a management technique that formed the foundation to professional development. By designing efficiency in the workplace Taylor's theory was a scientific attempt at professional development. A goal of professional development is to enable the person to learn and grow. Thus with school principals it should be noted that to achieve change, professional development should create an environment for responsible professionals rather than accountable workers.

As a foundational theme within the literature review pertaining to school principals' sources of knowledge the role of professional development has a two-fold effect on the school principal. First, professional development strengthens the school principal's leadership capacity in the decision-making processes and, second, professional development provides individual professional growth that strengthens the school principal's craft knowledge. The importance of professional knowledge upon the school principal's effectiveness as a leader is included in standard two of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). *Standards for School Leaders* (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 2001) Standard 2 states, "By advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth" (p. 103-112). The school principal's professional knowledge base, ability to influence change, promote teacher development, and implement effective academic programs is directly related to that individual principal's continual professional development. Barth (1990) noted:

More educational theorists are learning that what teachers teach and children learn, for better or worse, is heavily influenced by the school principal . . . If you had to pick one figure in the school system who really matters in terms of whether you get change or not, it is the principal." (p. 55)

Along with the individual principal's professional development participation, the significant issues are that of the principal's selection, planning, and ultimate implementation of the knowledge into his or her school. McCay (2001) stated, "Professional development for school principals should focus on developing qualities of active learning, reflection, and leadership. Emphasizing only the technical nature of the job – for example, skills that are easily packaged into a training session – is not sufficient" (p. 77). Considering the extensive amount of training available to school leaders appropriate research is a necessity in order to match the professional development with the principal's needs. It should be noted that much of the professional development available to principals is associated with vendors of specific curriculum programs. With this is the aspect of budgetary concerns that some enterprises that offer professional development are for-profit. Proper research into the effectiveness and usefulness of programs is essential work on the part of the principal. It is the duty of the school principal to examine all professional development programs that are intended for use within the school or for their individual specific needs and determine whether the program is grounded in scientifically-based research. This is a management application rather than a leadership function.

The purpose for professional development must be defined within the context of the planning and selection by the school principal. McCay (2001) noted that when principals plan professional development for teachers they should begin with the end in mind. In other words they may ask themselves, "What purpose will the professional development serve toward reaching the goal of improved student learning" (McCay, 2001, p. 23). Many development programs focus on student achievement rather than student development. In contrast Armstrong (2006) wrote about student development versus student achievement, saying:

The adventure of learning, the wonder of nature and culture, the richness of human experience, and the delight in acquiring new abilities all seem to have been abandoned or

severely curtailed in the classroom in this drive to meet quotas, deadlines, benchmarks, mandates, and targets. (p. 7)

Much of the literature provides the perspective of how principals use professional development for their faculty. In order for school principals to gain knowledge from professional development they must analyze their own professional development needs and seek training in those areas. Youngs and King (2002) discussed principals' professional development saying, “. . . professional development for principals can potentially help them understand the main elements of school capacity” (p. 667).

The need for professional development is not just for new principals and principals who are facing educational change. The literature reflects new studies in which researchers are finding that veteran principals need continual professional training. Williams (2010) stated:

In addition school districts may want to examine the professional development offered to veteran principals to ensure the information provided is effective and relevant training. School districts must provide continuing education which helps veteran principals navigate the many facets of school leadership to ensure academic success for the students. (p. 108)

Electronic Sources

One of the most important bases of knowledge that school principals must possess is a high aptitude in technology literacy. The position of school principal requires a high degree of proficiency in technology applications. Electronic technology applications that school principals use daily include e-mail, internet searches, office suite software, state on-line databases and portals, vendor on-line databases, education websites, and online journals.

Electronic sources of knowledge that school principals use to assist and improve their professional practice will likely involve searching the Internet for specific educational knowledge. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) stated, “The strengths of using the internet for

educational research include access to full-text documents, the most current research, discussion forums, and information from around the world” (p. 99). With the availability of such large volumes of information school principals must possess skills and resources to analyze the information presented on-line effectively and efficiently. McMillian and Schumacher stated, “The challenge is to sift through a plethora of websites to find high-quality information” (p. 85).

Effective school leaders use technology within their professional leadership practice and implement technology resources into the schools they lead. Lecklinder, Britten, Clausen, and Muncie (2009) stated, “Effective school administrators provide leadership, resources, and professional development for teachers, setting the stage for technology use that supports instructional change and student learning” (p. 28) . The literature review reveals the importance of the school administrators’ knowledge and literacy with respect to technology and electronic educational resources. Bechtel (2007) reported that an elementary school principal remarked, “There isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t look up some kind of information on the internet” (p. 90-91).

With social media technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype, instant messaging applications, and others evolving within very short time frames, school principals may benefit from an up-to-date knowledge-base of these electronic applications. Wireless computer technology has revolutionized society in general within the context of instant communication. Social media applications are revolutionizing education in the U.S. and school principals have vast sources of knowledge and instant communication at their disposal. Just as the use of e-mail in the last decade evolved, communication within the principalship this decade has followed the rise of social media. Social media provides school principals with an unlimited communication range to disseminate information and retrieve information with seamless ease. Social media also

provide school principals both viable and unreliable sources of knowledge. According to the report, *School Principals and Social Networking in Education: Practices, Policies, and Realities in 2010*, “Most responding principals indicated that social networking sites have value in education as a way for educators to share information and resources, to create professional learning communities, and to improve school wide communications with students and staff” (edWeb, IESD, MCH Strategic Data, & MMS Education, 2010, p. 36).

Mentoring and Coaching

How do principals gain the professional knowledge and skills they need to be effective in their first years on the job? The literature presented in this review suggests that there is a need for mentoring for new principals and veteran principals alike. In general principal mentoring provides a positive experience for new school principals. Five themes appeared consistently throughout the literature review including: 1) the need for mentoring new principals, 2) leadership benefits of mentoring, 3) characteristics of effective mentoring, 4) limitations of mentoring, and 5) effective new school principal mentoring benefits. Preliminary conclusions indicate that there are several benefits of mentoring for beginning principals. Malone (2001) stated that, “To help their new principals succeed, more school districts are capitalizing on the expertise of their senior administrators by adding mentor programs to the mix of practical training programs for beginning principals” (p. 1).

Both mentoring and coaching are referred to as similar processes within the scholarly literature. However it should be noted that new principals are not the only professionals who require such sources of knowledge in order to assist them within the role of school principal. With federal and state reforms it must be noted that within the current educational change structures in Tennessee and across the nation, mentoring and coaching has benefits to assist all

school principals regardless of experience levels. Bloom, Costagna, Warren, and Moir (2005) stated, “Research shows that it is essential that principals and school leaders effectively lead school improvement efforts, and that they benefit significantly from intensive, contextualized support from a coach to support these efforts” (p. 48). Estrella-Henderson and Jessop furthered Bloom et al.’s work while discussing ways all principals can benefit from coaching during times of educational change and reform.

Several themes emerge from the literature related to mentoring and coaching that include: 1) the need for mentoring new principals, 2) leadership benefits of mentoring, 3) characteristics of effective mentoring, 4) limitations of mentoring, and 5) effective new school principal mentoring benefits.

Theme 1: Need for Mentoring of New Principals

Various factors have brought mentoring for new school principals to the forefront of educational administration. Due to the increased accountability placed on our school principals through demands such as high-stakes testing, annual evaluations, and the pressure to increase student achievement through reform efforts on all levels of public education, the need for mentoring and coaching of new and veteran principals has become a major priority across this county’s school districts and collegiate educational administration programs. According to Glover (2013), “These are all management techniques designated to move toward outcomes generated beyond the school level, reflecting measurement toward a standardized curriculum.” Armstrong (2006) stated, “If schools continue to focus the conversation on rigor and accountability and ignore more human elements of education, many students may miss out on opportunities to discover the richness of individual exploration that schools can foster” (p. 103).

Principal mentoring can provide benefits to both new and veteran principals in the areas of student learning and development as well as student achievement.

Lovely (2004) stated, “Coaching and mentoring helps rookie principals grow on the job and gain confidence” (p. 10). Most if not all collegiate level educational administration programs have incorporated mentorship programs into their training. Internships in actual school administrative settings provide participants realistic on-the-job experience. The review of the literature and research provided evidence that several factors make up the need for mentoring of new school principals. Key factors included the stress and isolation of and inexperience in the position of school principal and overall leadership of the school in relationship to the complex roles and responsibilities of the principalship. Holloway (2004) stated, “Mentoring programs can provide the collegial support that new principals need” (p. 87).

Theme 2: Leadership Benefits of Mentoring

The research provided volumes of reports and articles that discussed the need for principal mentoring to increase the principal’s leadership ability. Hall (2008) stated:

The education profession is now embracing a new, vision of professionalization at the administrator level: principals as master artisans guiding less-experienced principals, formally and intentionally building bridges to the future of school leadership. With the growth in professionalism and setting higher expectations the districts have to be keenly aware that just to have a mentoring program does not mean that the new principals will benefit from the program.” (p. 449)

Duncan and Stock (2010) stated, “To be effective instructional leaders who work well with people, create a collegial environment, and use data to drive decisions, new and experienced principals need coaching in those specific skills” (p. 306). Those in the public education administrative community understand the need for mentoring of principals. For many years new teacher mentoring has been implemented in school districts across the country. However, it has only been in the past decade that administrative mentoring has been discussed, implemented, and

studied as a very important component to the success of new school administrators, especially those in the principalship.

Theme 3: Characteristics of Effective Mentoring

The most crucial issue with the research on new school principal mentoring is addressed in Theme 3. In order for new school principal mentoring to be effective with a positive product, the mentoring programs themselves must have successful characteristics. Crocker and Harris (2002) defined the three characteristics of effective mentoring programs:

1. Mentors should be provided with a resource to build in time to spend with the mentee. This could be done by assigning other support help for the mentor that even considers a release from certain duties while acting as a mentor.
2. Specific guidelines should be available to the mentor outlining roles for the mentee that include meaningful activities and delineate ways to involve mentees in these experiences.
3. Formal mentor training should require attendance and should include specific training that emphasizes building relationships and professional collaborative behaviors. (p. 17)

The research review relates the key elements of just how crucial the various characteristics are to any mentoring program. As a consultant Hopkins-Thompson, former director of the Wake Leadership Academy in Raleigh, N.C., described some of the common features of effective mentoring programs:

1. Organizational Support.
2. Clearly Defined Outcomes.
3. Screening, Selection, and Pairing.
4. Training Mentors and Proteges (mentees).
5. Learner Centered Focus. (Education Alliance at Brown University and National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2003, p. 16).

In order for a school district to establish a new school principal mentoring program the effective characteristics need to be implemented within the structure and development of the mentoring program. This information is especially important for school district leaders to consider due to the fact that many Tennessee school districts are developing district-led mentoring principal mentoring and coaching programs. Christian (2011) stated “effective mentoring has been the direct result of intentional and calculated processes designed by a collaborative effort between states, universities, school districts, and school site principals” (p. 69).

Another key component of any mentoring program is the methods the mentors apply within the mentoring process. Based on research and experience at the Extra Support for Principals (ESP) program in Albuquerque, New Mexico – including collaboration with other school districts across the nation – Weingartner (2002) listed basic principles for mentoring principals:

1. Be Low-key in Your Approach.
2. Always be Positive and Supportive.
3. Celebrate the Appointment
4. Let the Protégé (mentee) Determine How Much Help You Can Be.
5. Be Willing to “back off.”
6. Don’t take Rejection of Ideas Personally.
7. Continually Reinforce the Confidential Nature of the Relationship.
8. Recognize the Need for Time Outside of School.
9. Be There for Them.
10. Collaborate with Other Mentoring Teams.
11. Mentors Gain from Experience.

12. Offer to Support Administrative Efforts with the Protégé.
13. Be Careful About Discussing the Protégé with Administrators.
14. Plan Ahead So You Are Available During Busy Times.
15. Motivate the Proteges to Think for Themselves.
16. Plan Ways to Spend Time Together. (Weingartner, 2002, p. 1-2)

The implementation of these principles provide the foundation for the development of school principal mentoring programs. Both the effective characteristics of the program and of the specific mentor in essence will establish the overall development of the mentee. The research shows that effective mentoring programs always relate to the needs of the mentee in the principalship. These principles also provide the need for each program to be designed in order to meet the individualized needs of each mentee.

Theme 4: Limitations of Mentoring

In order for a school district to study properly the effects of school principal mentoring programs and address the need for such programs for their own principals, district leaders must be aware of these limitations of these programs. Research conducted by Bush and Coleman (1995) in England described the general limitations of mentoring for new heads (principals):

1. Insufficient time to develop the relationship properly.
2. The risk of the new head becoming too dependent on the mentor.
3. The possibility of a “mismatch” between mentor and new head leading to the “failure” of the relationship (Bush & Coleman, 1995, p. 21).

Time limitations are clearly the focal point of the mentor-mentee relationship. With the complex role of the mentor and in order to support the mentee effectively, time resources need to be properly orchestrated into the program. Appropriate time is needed for the mentee to ask

questions, follow up, and reflect on specific details. Time is crucial to the success of the mentoring programs.

Due to the limitations of dependency and mismatching of mentors to mentees, one must take into account the process of individualization of mentor to mentee. This process in determining the participants in the relationship is critical and if careful screening and interviewing takes precedence these limitations will be negated. Playko (1995) noted that there are some important issues regarding limitations that must be considered by schools and districts with an interest in mentoring:

1. Planning Issues
2. Lack of Training
3. Inappropriate Matching (Playko, 1995, p. 89).

Theme 5: Effective School Principal Mentoring Benefits

During the literature review the main trend that surfaced in the study of the changing principalship and mentoring programs for school principals are the benefits gained from such programs. Much of the literature suggests that many districts and systems are putting a priority on mentoring for their newly hired (inexperienced) principals for the effects (benefits) of mentoring. In the arena of higher learning on the graduate level this is partly due to the addition of mentorship programs built into the masters of education administration and supervision degree requirements. The push for mentoring of new teachers over a decade ago has prompted universities to establish programs for leadership in educational positions in education.

One can conclude that the basics for the establishment of effective mentoring programs is the attention to planning, training, and appropriate matching of mentors and mentees. West (2002) concluded that through principal mentoring “. . . instructional leadership was one area

that both novices and veterans reported as being critical to their success and survival in their role. Instruction loomed large as a topic that was always on the minds of both groups of participants” (p. 196).

Human Resources

The principalship is a unique position that requires consistent communication between the school leader and various school stakeholders. One of the key aspects of the principalship is his or her skill at decision making. Analysis of the public school principal’s day-to-day operations includes a wide range of decisions. Decisions involving student safety, instructional matters, and legal issues are some of most important responsibilities that school principals face. What knowledge sources assist principals in the decision making process? Professional relationships, such as relationships with teachers, peers (other school principals), and stakeholders can provide valuable sources of knowledge. Fullen (2002) stated, “Well established relationships are the resource that keep on giving” (p. 18).

Professional relationships with central office supervisors, the superintendent, and other stakeholders are important leadership aspects of the principalship. These professional working relationships provide the principal the ability to seek understanding through questioning and even challenging higher authority. The importance of professional relationships in regard to the school principal’s effectiveness as a leader is included in standard six of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). *Standards for School Leaders* Standard 6 states, “by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context” (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 2001, p. 103-112).

According to Johnson and Uline (2005), who discussed school leadership in regard to ISLLC Standard 6:

As they communicate what they know, they must craft messages in ways to empower rather than overwhelm, and create focus and coherence rather than confusion. They must be able to respond efficiently and effectively so that the educational endeavor does not suffer. Furthermore, they must be creative in using the context as a tool for advancing the goals of educational equity and excellence. Finally, they must be able to engage with policymakers in ways to improve the quality of policy decisions. (p. 45-52)

Ragland, Asera, and Johnson (1999) stated, “though some leaders decried the challenges of the state accountability system, very successful leaders used the same systems to underscore the need to improve teaching and learning for diverse populations of students” (p. 7). A responsibility of the school principal is to provide stakeholders with feedback about programs. This responsibility can affect the larger social, economic, legal, and cultural context of learning.

The opening vignette discussion of the veteran principal who participated in a new principal training for 2 years provided a catalyst for this literature review. For school principals to produce and sustain schools that are effective they require support to achieve and maintain these goals. One of the most important knowledge sources that school principals use is the knowledge learned from the interaction with colleagues, especially experienced school principals within their own district. Principals and former principals can attest to the value of the opportunities they have to network, discuss, and provide and receive advice. The ability for the school principal to develop relationships with other principals within the district is crucial. Many times advice from another principal can instill professional knowledge and promote confidence when making tough decisions. These relationships can provide a foundation of support in the decision-making process, foster learning, and build collegiality. Fullen (2002) stated, “Creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership. Information, of which we have a glut, only becomes knowledge through a social process. For this reason, relationships and professional learning communities are essential” (p. 18).

Within the dynamic of human relationships that the principal builds and maintains, sources of knowledge through relationships can be fostered through listening, emotional intelligence, and reflection. Dana, Tericarico, and Quinn (2009) discussed school principals' self-reflection and interaction with colleagues, "The principals discovered the importance of intentional examination of their own practice and the need for open and honest reflection with their colleagues" (p. 259). Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) discussed relationships in the development of the school principals in detail saying:

The single factor common to successful change is that relationships improve. If relationships improve, schools get better. If relationships remain the same or get worse, ground is lost. Thus leaders, build relationships with diverse people and groups – especially with people who think differently. In complex times, emotional intelligence is a must. Emotionally intelligent leaders are aware of their own emotional intelligence makeup and are sensitive and inspiring to others. (p. 18)

Drawing on the connection of other principals is very effective whether within the school district or not. Literature provides examples of principal networking, use of e-mail, phone conversations, and meetings. Research provides findings of sources of knowledge for school principals within networking and meeting with other principals. Fox and McCormick (2009) stated, "The most important benefit of attending events was in networking rather than the formal purpose of the event itself" (p. 198). Time school principals spend together is invaluable as a source of knowledge. Dana et al. stated, "To address the issue of time, districts should examine their existing structures (e.g. monthly meetings) and recast them as opportunities for school leaders to not only engage in inquiry but support one another within it" (p. 259).

Principal-to-principal interaction has received little attention in the literature. However these relationships provide some of the most important knowledge sources that practicing principals can use within their profession. Issues behind the fact that the principal-to-principal

relationship gets very little attention was discussed by Connelly and Director (2007). They stated:

First, principals often feel isolated in their buildings, with few opportunities to directly share with and learn from their peers, whether across town or across the country. Second, principals unfailingly put the needs of others ahead of their own and so willingly invest time and energy in providing networks of support for students and teachers, but often overlook the value of building and nurturing their own networks. (p. 48)

Within the literature review of human resources is the component of communication and the school principal's effectiveness at communication. Without communication personnel resources are of no value as a source of knowledge. Fisher (1974) stated, "Some of the positive communication behaviors that account for successful leader emergence include being verbally involved, being informed, seeking other's opinions, initiating new ideas, and being firm but not rigid" (p. 6). Not only are communication skills important for the principal's leadership of his or her school, it is a critical component of the successful use of personnel sources of knowledge.

In a study involving the mentoring of aspiring principals, tacit knowledge emerged as a theme. Barnett (2013) stated, "Tacit knowledge refers to knowledge that a person has obtained through experience and is difficult to teach others because the person with tacit knowledge may be unaware that she or he has that knowledge" (p. 52). Barnett studied the effect of being a mentor for aspiring principals. He found that the experience helped these principals come to understand their own tacit knowledge. Barnett stated, "When asked about tacit knowledge, a common theme among mentors was relationship development. Participants learned about their tacit knowledge through reflecting about their practices with the intern" (p. 76).

In summary the review of human resources is one of the least used resources of sources of knowledge. Educational leaders should know their administrative staffs including assistant principal(s) and head teachers are key assets within the pursuit of student social and academic

growth. These administrative staff members can be valuable sources of knowledge. Besides providing support, knowledge, and advice on various school matters, the school principals can use these personnel resources in areas where they are effective, thus minimizing the burden on the principal of day-to-day school operations. Gilson stated, “Administrators do not possess all of the skills or time to get every the job done. The key is to find other people who are good at these jobs, and let them shine” (p. 93). Gilson (2008) reiterated the power of delegation within the principalship. When school principals carefully delegate responsibilities, it is not only a time management strategy it produces valuable personnel sources of knowledge.

Principals’ Barriers to Acquire and Use Knowledge

Time Barriers

Barriers are the forces that interfere with the school principal’s ability to acquire and use sources of knowledge. Time constraints are a daily struggle for school principals. Bechtel (2007) discussed school principals’ time constraints saying, “Their time to provide leadership to impact students’ achievement competes with the time necessary to complete administrative tasks” (p. 42). Time management strategies differ depending on the school principal’s roles and responsibilities coupled with their own management and leadership styles. Pass (1992) stated, “What works for one person may not work for another. Forcing the use of a system that goes against your [work-management style] or organizational style is a waste of time” (p. 12).

School principals’ time management has been addressed as a tool that is individualized to their specific positional roles and responsibilities. This process requires principals to prioritize specific activities and demands. When school principals place priorities on their time, they can pursue needed specific sources of knowledge. Gould (1998) found “that for schools to improve, principals needed to prioritize helping students to increase learning” (p. 43).

Data Barriers

Time constraints are the barriers that limit school principals in their pursuit of sources of knowledge especially data study and the implementation of data findings into curricular and instructional change. As discussed earlier, the volume of data and the sources of data available to principals are the most significant barriers to the principal's usage of data sources of knowledge. Torrence (2002) discussed time as a barrier to data usage noting the "lack of sufficient time to retrieve and analyze data" (p. 95).

Unlike other knowledge sources data are on-going and updated frequently. Tennessee school principals make data decisions yearly with the analysis of achievement assessments (TCAP), formative assessments, and benchmark testing. Danielson (2002) stated, "But the collection and analysis of data is not a one-shot affair; it must be a habit. Data regarding student achievement, attendance, and dropout rates continue to be collected, disaggregated and analyzed on a regular basis" (p. 128). Due to the Tennessee's education reform initiative, the atmosphere of high-stakes testing places Tennessee principals in the precarious position of aligning curriculum and directing teachers to instruct according to the test. Currently this is a unique student achievement accountability situation that all Tennessee principals face.

Research and Literature Barriers

Several factors create barriers for school principals to acquire and use research and literature within their professional setting. As discussed earlier, a principal's limited prior knowledge would certainly be a barrier to acquiring new knowledge. However, educational research has traditionally maintained a negative image as far as usefulness until recently with the advent of educational reform. McGaw, Boud, Poole, Warry, and McKenzie (1992) stated, "Educational administrators and practitioners perceive much of educational research to be

irrelevant to their concerns” (p. 2). Biddle and Saha’s (2002) extensive work with educational research provided three barriers that principals face with acquisition to and use of research into their professional practice:

1. The educational research enterprise faces structural problems that are not common in other fields of research. This means that all sorts of competing (and sometimes antithetical) scholarly activities, methods, and standards may appear under the educational umbrella, and this generates confusion.
2. Advocates have sometimes justified support for research on education by claiming that it (alone) can solve problems.
3. Research on education, particularly in the United States, is plagued by a flood of weak studies generated by several forces: doctoral candidates in education programs who need to be credentialed but are also required by their universities, to complete underfunded, “original” research for their dissertations; federal and state laws that mandate (often pro forma) “evaluations” of targeted programs; unpublished “reports” that are prepared by foundations, ideologically driven institutes, and federally funded research and development centers; propaganda “studies” prepared by advocates for specific innovations; and so forth. (Biddle & Saha, 2002, p. 14)

Professional Development Barriers

Barriers to professional development for school principals seem to mirror the barriers of professional development for teachers. The risk for principals simply not to act due to time constraints, budgetary concerns, and sometimes negative perceptions can stifle and in most cases prevent professional growth and professional learning. In the situation of the school principal’s pursuit of professional development sources of knowledge the principal must plan and develop the faculty’s professional development as well as tailor professional development to specific needs.

The primary barriers are time and funding. As with teachers, principals have to juggle scheduling and attain funding for these sessions. Keith (2011) discussed principals’ professional development desirability differences and found, “Overall, principals with 11-20 years of experience demonstrated a stronger desire for professional development than less veteran

principals or principals having 20+ years of experience” (p. 124). The literature review provided that the desire for the principal to acquire specific sources of knowledge as a key barrier. When the lesser barriers of time and funding are overcome the principal’s own desire for specific learning can be pursued.

Electronic Barriers

With technology revolutionizing everyday communication and a continual decline in basic costs for mainstreamed electronic devices such as smart phones, tablet devices, and laptops (which many school districts issue to principals and supervisors), electronic barriers to their availability and use seem to be diminishing. However, in educational administration change is sometimes met with resistance and change sometimes takes longer periods of time. This is not the situation with today’s students who are comfortable with advancements in technology and communication. Barriers to electronic sources of knowledge are similar to those of professional development; for the school principal to use these sources it is ultimately the individual principal’s own desire. The literature has provided ample research regarding school principals’ use of e-mail and other wireless technology devices for communication. The literature provides evidence that school principals are somewhat slower to acknowledge and use advancements in electronic sources of knowledge. In a report that studied school principals and social networking in education co-sponsors edWeb, IESD, MCH Strategic Data, & MMS Education (2010) found a wide variety of uses with social networking:

1. Most of the principals were using social networking to communicate and collaborate outside the district.
2. About half of the principals were using it to communicate and collaborate with colleagues inside their districts.
3. About half were using it for professional development for teachers.

4. Several principals were also using it to engage with students, parents, and/or the local community. (edWeb, IESD, MCH Strategic Data, & MMS Education, 2010, p. 13)

The report continued to define some of the disadvantages of social networking in education that were identified by principals:

1. Lack of facial and vocal cues.
2. Too much content to sift through; not enough time. (edWeb, IESD, MCH Strategic Data, & MMS Education, 2010, p. 13)

Evidence of the usefulness of electronic sources to knowledge is available throughout the literature review; however, the school principal must take the initiative to use these sources.

During this era of education reform and accountability, social media provides a viable platform for principals to communicate efficiently in regard to specific issues.

Human Resource Barriers

Human resource barriers stem from the school principal's social skills and internal inhibitions to the use of networking with colleagues. These barriers are directly correlated to the school principal's communication skills. Northouse (2007) stated, "Communication is the vehicle through which leaders and subordinates create, nurture, and sustain useful exchanges. Effective leadership occurs when the communication of leaders and subordinates is characterized by mutual trust, respect, and commitment" (p. 159). Communication is two-way and without the characteristics that Northouse (2007) mentioned, personnel resources will not provide the school principal an effective source of knowledge. The school principal must commit to the development of positive communication skills to prevent personnel barriers.

A principal networking with colleagues breaks the isolation barrier. When networking is used with electronic technology, time constraints are diminished. This is a very important component of communication; the barriers of travel and time are erased when technology

resources are used in meetings with the capability to participate through an on-line modality. E-mails, text messaging, and phone conversations also are very important in diminishing the barriers of personnel resources. These technologies ease the barriers for the human resource colleague(s) and or school stakeholders to communicate with the school principal that in turn provides the principal with sources of knowledge.

Communication by the school principal with those in central authority can overcome human resource barriers and promote the success of all students when responding to the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts of schooling. Johnson and Uline (2005) stated:

They knew the landscape well enough to avoid drowning in the issues that overcame their less knowledgeable colleagues. They moved quickly through other gauntlets, avoiding consumption of their time, energy, and passion. Furthermore, they found proactive and strategic ways to employ potential barriers in creating a sense of urgency for the kinds of improvements in teaching and learning they worked to inspire. (p. 45-52)

District-Led Mentoring and Coaching Programs for Principals

Concerns for many of the nation's public school principals include role expectations, isolation, lack of support, lack of time, and expectations to implement state and national school reform measures effectively. Simieou, Decman, Grigsby, and Schumacher (2010) stated, "More than ever, it is paramount for school districts to respond to these challenges by preparing their leaders and providing support for leadership and school success" (p. 1). Mentoring and coaching are important components necessary to ensure that novice principals have a support structure and availability to sources of knowledge in order to become successful. The principalship has been placed at the cornerstone of school reforms. In order for novice principals to have the exposure to professional knowledge and a support structure many districts are developing their own principal mentoring programs. In Tennessee and many other states school districts are partnering

with university professors to implement mentoring programs for their beginning and aspiring principals. Simieou et al. concluded that district-led principal mentoring can provide:

1. Principals need regular, structured support throughout the entire school year.
2. Practical experiences they can implement immediately were beneficial to the principals as well.
3. The group setting with principals of multiple levels was another added advantage to the leadership cadre.
4. The mentors or coaches from outside are a very important factor in assisting the administrators. (p. 1-9)

The literature provides information about the positive benefits of principal mentoring. However, there is not a large pool of district-led mentoring results. The articles, scholars, and research projects that do exist on this topic conclude that there is a shift to the individual school districts developing their own principal mentoring programs. However, with the current trend in school reforms it is necessary that school districts take the initiative to prepare their principals.

Simieou et al. concluded:

Peer mentoring for novice principals is an important component school districts around the nation are beginning to invest more of their resources. The assistance and intervention of a mentor or coach could contribute to lowering the attrition rates of administrators in the K-12 system and give novice administrators the needed support to be successful. (p. 7)

Saban and Wolfe (2009) discussed issues regarding school district principal mentoring programs saying:

Today, many school districts across the nation are designing and implementing mentoring programs to meet the challenge of training and supporting new leaders. Mentoring is not a panacea that will automatically cure all of the problems traditionally associated with new leaders and new roles; however, it is a very important way to assist people in becoming socialized to a new professional role or to a new organization. It is a way to promote continuing, effective development and refinement of skills which are already present in many new leaders. (p. 5)

Issues for School Principals in Rural Settings

Within the school principalship the need for and the opportunities that rural school principals have in receiving needed knowledge may be even more critical to the success of the principal than that of urban and suburban principals. Rural school principals may have some special knowledge needs. Howley, Chadwick, and Howley (2002) discussed research findings related to professional development needs that are common to rural principals:

1. Calls for reform direct particular attention to low-performing schools and districts many of which are situated in rural locales.
2. Rural school principals tend to be less educated than their urban and suburban counterparts.
3. Rural principals are more isolated than principals in other locales.
4. Rural principals assume a wider range of roles than other principals.
5. Higher turnover rates make it likely that many of them will be new to their jobs.
6. Rural administrators seem to benefit from professional development that is voluntary and collaborative.
7. The ability to exchange ideas with peers (i.e., “networking”) seems to be an extremely important feature of professional development initiatives. (p. 171-187).

Rural principals across the country have varied job responsibilities from partial teaching assignments, financial management and school business, head leadership role, and instructional leadership. This places rural school principals in situations that encompass a diverse accountability responsibility. Howley et al. (2002) discussed the reality of mentoring programs for rural principals saying, “Few systematic programs for the professional development of rural principals – using either mentoring or other approaches – have been undertaken” (p. 171). In Tennessee several principal mentoring and coaching programs have been developed including

the Knoxville Leadership Academy, the Center for Urban School Leadership at the University of Memphis, and Hamilton County's Principal Leadership Academy. However, these programs primarily serve the metropolitan areas of the state. Rural districts must provide effective principals to the schools they serve, and rural school districts can learn from these various models for school leadership. However, the concern is for the rural districts to take the initiative and develop school mentoring and coaching programs not only for their current principals but also for those teacher leaders who aspire to become principals someday. Progress in the area of school leadership will not be achieved in rural districts until they either participate in a principal mentoring and coaching program already established by an outside entity or develop a program of their own.

Summary

The review of literature provided an analysis of the possible components that may comprise school principals' sources of knowledge. These potential sources of knowledge cover a wide range and if tapped may provide the foundation for informed decision making. The sources of knowledge discussed in the review of literature consisted of data, research and literature, professional development, electronic sources, mentoring and coaching, and resource personnel – resources that can provide the school principal a knowledge base that he or she can use to make informed decisions that have the potential to promote effective instructional, leadership, and management decisions.

For many decades school principals have been the object of research studies focusing on effective management techniques, school leadership traits, and the culmination of the principal into the role as each individual school's instructional leader. Bechtel (2007) found, "An investigation of elementary school principals' knowledge sources in their roles should offer

insight for administrators, researchers, and policy-makers” (p. 51). This insight or awareness may be a critical tool that school principals should be able to depend upon when confronted with difficult decisions.

Each year in Tennessee there are numerous changes in school administrators especially within the principal and vice principalships. Confronted with a high degree of accountability and strenuous demands to increase student achievement, Tennessee principals need access to specific information pertaining to the needs of their schools in order to counteract those high demands. This literature review revealed various sources of knowledge available to school principals and barriers to their access. With this literature review Tennessee principals from either rural, suburban, or urban areas can have a better understanding of the various sources of knowledge and access to those sources of knowledge when making difficult decisions, implementing change, and instituting school reforms.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to discover what principals in one East Tennessee School district understand as knowledge, their perceptions of a district-led formal mentoring program, and barriers to acquiring and using professional knowledge. In this study I examined the perceptions of six school principals regarding what they consider knowledge and the sources of knowledge from which they draw during their decision-making process in their principalship role.

Chapter 3 describes the methods applied in completing the study. Specific detailed sections explain the approach, research questions, interview process and data collection, ethical protocol, role of the researcher, validity and reliability, data analysis, and summary.

Qualitative Research and the Interpretivist Approach

Qualitative analysis was used to determine what the participants considered knowledge and specifically what sources of knowledge were available to these principals. The findings of this study presented knowledge that may be of value in developing or improving a mentoring program. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “Qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to understand and interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).

Richards and Morse (2007) noted that qualitative research is usually not preemptive. Whatever the method, the indications of form, quality, and scope must be obtained from the research questions in an ongoing process from the data collected during the interviews (p. 73).

The interpretivist approach was used to present and analyze the perceptions of what the school principals who participated consider knowledge. The interpretive research methodology placed an emphasis on the researcher's professional judgment and perspective and on the participants' values and context of the perceptions of specific professional knowledge.

Qualitative research methods were applied to assess participant principals' perceptions regarding professional knowledge, barriers they experience acquiring and using this knowledge, and what value they find, if any, for a newly formed district mentoring program. This research presented participants' perceptions, strategies, and characteristics and developed common themes that existed with the group of principals within a small rural Tennessee school district. O'Donoghue (2007) stated, "This approach emphasizes social interaction as the basis for knowledge. The researcher uses his or her skills as a social being to try to understand how others understand their world. Knowledge, in this view, is constructed by mutual negotiation and it is specific to the situation being investigated" (p. 9-10).

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine what sources of professional knowledge are available to principals in one rural East Tennessee school district. This study addressed four primary research questions:

1. What do principals in this school district consider as professional knowledge?
2. What interferes with or limits these principals' ability to acquire and use professional knowledge?
3. What supports or extends the principal's ability to acquire and use professional knowledge?
4. What are the principals' perceptions of the need for a district-led formal mentoring program in order to be a more effective school leader?

Data Collection Procedures

This study involved the interpretative approach to assess the participants' perceptions and experiences. Principals from one rural East Tennessee school district were selected for participation in this study. The study first consisted of a preliminary data collection procedure. Ten of the school district's principals completed a demographic questionnaire and list of survey questions developed from the four research questions and elements of the literature review. These data were reviewed by the researcher in order to categorize the respondents' responses into meaningful demographic data.

The final data collection procedure consisted of six principals chosen to complete face-to-face interviews consisting of open ended questions developed from an initial interview protocol. Coding was used to identify possible themes that corresponded to the primary research questions. Basit (2003) discussed the importance of coding within qualitative research, "What coding does, above all, is to allow the researcher to communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging phenomena and to generate theory grounded in the data" (p. 152). Strauss and Corbin (1994) discussed grounded theory methodology as "theory may be generated initially from the data, or if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them (p. 273).

I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with six principals who participated in the original survey. I invited 10 principals to participate. The four other principals I chose stated that time constraints prevented them from participation. The interviews were tape recorded face-to-face interviews. The interviews were transcribed and e-mailed to the participants for member checking. Creswell and Miller (2000) discussed member checking saying, "It consists of taking

data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (p. 127). Follow-up interviews for clarification and discovery of information were conducted as needed.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992):

The process of data analysis is an on-going process in qualitative research and can take place by developing, testing, and changing of propositions through: . . . The process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials . . . to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others. (p. 153)

Audio recording, transcription, member checking, and a semistructured interview process provided the researcher the ability to develop and refine themes that emerged from the initial survey.

Ethical Protocol

I protected the rights of the participants of the study by maximizing potential benefits and minimizing potential risks. Participants’ safety and privacy were protected. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) stated, “The researcher is ethically responsible for the rights and welfare of the subjects who participate in a study” (p. 15). Research with the qualitative methodology is engrained in the human element. McMillian and Schumacher stated, “Thus, ethical guidelines include policies regarding informed consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, and caring” (p. 338). I acquired Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and followed their guidelines that require that the researcher gain consent from participants, follow the IRB policies and procedures, and protect the rights and welfare of the participants while carrying out sound, ethical, and approved research plans.

Role of the Researcher

Merriam (1998) stated that “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 7). As a principal in the school system studied, a strong potential for bias exists. I am aware of that bias and made every effort to minimize it. An experienced school administrator not connected to the study served as a peer reviewer. I strived to gain an understanding of the sources of knowledge that the participants use in their professional role.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

Research studies conducted with ethical guidelines ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Creswell and Miller (2000) stated, “Qualitative researchers employ member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits. Researchers engage in one or more of these procedures and report results in their investigations” (p. 125). I constructed interviews to be reliable and valid. I assured internal validity of the study through member checking, audio recording, transcription, and coding. I examined the findings as they emerged from the data. My peer reviewer also examined the findings. This public school administrator who is a fellow doctoral graduate student checked for validity by asking meaning, method, and interpretation questions. The truthfulness of the study referred to the extent that the research could be replicated.

A method employed in this study – employing multiple sources of data – enhanced the accuracy of results and the overall truthfulness of the study. Initial surveys from 10 respondents, semistructured interviews from the six participants who committed to the study, and member-checking and follow-up interviews with all six participants were the multiple data sources employed. I audio recorded interview participants, used speech-to-text software for transcription purposes, sought peer review, and used member checking through e-mail.

Data Analysis

I coded and analyzed all data collected throughout the data collection phase of the research. Findings from the first set of interviews were coded and transcriptions sent back to the participants for member checking. Adjustments were made as needed, and as data emerged from the first set of interviews a second set of semistructured interview questions were developed and follow-up interviews were initiated. I sent the transcripts to the interviewees and asked for verification of the accuracy of each interview as a final member checking process. These findings were coded, emergent themes were developed, and a final peer review ensued. Merriam (1998) stated, “Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating” (p. 162).

Summary

In Chapter 3 I discussed the methods that I used during my research study. I have described my interpretivist research approach, interview process and data collection, ethical considerations, validity and reliability, and data analysis of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of what sources of knowledge are used by school principals in one rural East Tennessee school district and the barriers they face to using knowledge sources. Data about school principals' perceptions of potential knowledge sources and the barriers they face to using knowledge sources were gathered and analyzed. Six principals were surveyed during the summer of 2013. The selection of the participants consisted of all principals who volunteered to participate within the school district. The researcher asked the following questions to examine the perceptions of the principals about their understanding of potential sources of knowledge.

1. What professional knowledge do you have?
2. What do you consider as professional knowledge?
3. How do you obtain information you need in your role as school principal?
4. What interferes or limits your ability to acquire and use professional knowledge?
5. What supports or extends your ability to acquire and use professional knowledge?
6. What are the professional knowledge sources available in your school district?
7. What is your perception of the need for a district-led formal mentoring program to become a better leader?
8. When you need professional knowledge, do any of the following sources play a part in getting the information you need? Can you provide any specific examples of these sources that you have applied to decisions in your principalship role?
 - A. Data
 - B. Research and literature
 - C. Professional development
 - D. Electronic sources

E. Mentoring

9. Discuss how you use information about teaching and learning in your role as principal.
10. Discuss how you use information about leadership and management in your role as principal.

Each interview was conducted in the participant's school office. The participants were given a written description of the study and asked to sign an informed consent form. The participants were reminded that their participation in the research study was voluntary. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. A digital recording of each interview was made and transcribed. Each participant received a copy of his or her transcript to verify validity.

The researcher implemented an emergent research design in order to identify emerging themes from the interview protocol. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) stated, "More than anything else, emergent methods are about advancing our understanding of the human condition" (p. 12).

One goal was to develop themes about school principals' sources of knowledge that provided answers to the studies research questions. Participants were given a pseudonym and the names of their school and the school system were not included in this study to protect their identities. Participant pseudonyms are listed in Table 1:

Table 1

Participants in the Study

Participants	Gender	Years in Principalship
Participant 1 - Chantal	Female	1
Participant 2 - Abby	Female	5 ½
Participant 3 - Gabby	Female	14
Participant 4 - Barry	Male	21
Participant 5 - Tanya	Female	1
Participant 6 - Becky	Female	6

Themes

Analysis of interview transcripts from six school principals in one rural East Tennessee school district indicated eight themes about those principals’ sources of knowledge. These themes were: (a) variety of principals’ perceptions of professional knowledge, (b) variety of ways principals obtain professional knowledge, (c) barriers that limit the principals’ ability to acquire and use professional knowledge, (d) professional knowledge sources available in the principals’ school district, (e) variety of professional knowledge sources used by the district’s principals, (f) perceptions of district-wide principal mentoring, (g) perceptions of teaching and learning, and (h) perceptions of leadership and management.

Variety of Principals’ Perceptions of Professional Knowledge

Several principals spoke about their specific perceptions of professional knowledge. Becky, a principal with 6 years of experience, spoke about how she increases student achievement through student data and student personalities. She stated:

My professional knowledge deals with data, working with data teams, being able to look at school data and know what to do with it, how to increase scores. My professional knowledge also involves my staff, how I match up teachers with groups of students. I think you have to match up, teachers' personalities and students' personalities to get the best out of both.

Becky discussed the importance of interpersonal skills and management skills. She stated:

Knowing how to manage a staff, a group of people, where you have janitors, you have cafeteria workers, you have teaching assistants, and you have teachers. All of this staff of people you have to have good personal skills in order to make decisions. Sometimes situations are different with different groups of people. For example, with cafeteria staff, the problems would be totally different from what you would have with the teachers and just knowing how to get on a personal level with each group of people, I think is very beneficial.

Gabby, a principal with 14 years of experience, discussed her training and feedback from other education professionals. She stated:

I was very lucky that one of my main professors in my principalship program had been a principal of several schools in three different states. Feedback from him, one of probably my best strengths as a principal for professional knowledge would be the first school I took was on the list; I had three exemplary educators in my building from the state department that constantly drilled us on protocol, best practice, and how to make adjustments based on test data.

Gabby continued to discuss professional knowledge as information that principals learn through experience. She stated:

Professional knowledge is really what you learn on-the-job, to get the professional knowledge you can talk about it all day but you have to do it and put it into the real world of practice. I don't think it's professional, I think it's information. Professional knowledge is when you actually apply it on a day-to-day basis. It's when preparation, legal, and opportunity come together.

Abby, a principal with 5½ years of experience, described the importance of public relations, knowledge of the school community, being a member of the rural school community herself, and job experiences. She stated:

In my opinion professional knowledge comes from public relations and knowing how to work with people. Understanding education is one thing, but when you look at professional knowledge it includes so much more – you have to understand the people that are in your community and in doing so, I feel like that assists you in knowing the needs of your school. So professional knowledge is or what professional knowledge do I have? I am a lifelong community member here, I was raised here, went to school here, and [am] related to several people here in the community. So as far as that goes it really helps me when I look at the students and go “Here is where they come from and here is where they have been, what experiences they have had and been exposed to” then you can step outside of that and you go to the education part of it. I have had several courses but I feel like most of my education comes from doing the job. I live and learn every day. There is no school that can prepare you for what you are going to face. It goes from everything; from budget to that kindergartner that is missing being at home.

Abby stressed the importance of communication and having a district plan with the principals to play a part with initiating new programs. She stated:

If you ask me what my professional knowledge is, it’s going to be in communication. In saying that, does it mean that I’m the best communicator? No, but I surround myself with people that are. I feel like you have to know where your district is going. Sometimes I feel like we are the last people to know but need to be the first people on board to have buy-in. I think it is better now than it ever has been but there is progress that can be made in making all that happen.

Barry, a principal for 21 years, stressed his education and his experiences in two rural East Tennessee school districts. He stated:

I went through a university administration and supervision program and received my master’s degree. I was accepted to the doctoral program and went through my year of residency. I was on a fellowship and the fellowship ended – my money ran out and I did not finish the doctoral program. About that time a master’s in education with administration and supervision was a rarity; in a way it’s more like a doctoral degree is now. I think I was the second person in my county to earn a master’s degree. Then I ended up as a principal of a high school for 5 years. I had no assistants; it was just me. I went into business for 20 years and came back to the same high school and served 7 more years before coming to my current school district. Attending trainings and professional development workshops during the summer along with collaboration with other principals throughout the year have been my main sources of professional knowledge.

Tanya, a principal with 1 year of experience, discussed the need for school principals to be understanding of the teachers' expectations and an understanding of the curriculum. She stated:

To me a good principal needs to understand what the teachers are going through and it is hard to go in and do an evaluation if you do not understand the curriculum. You do not know what you're looking for if you do not understand the curriculum. We need to know what the standards are that they are teaching and know all about the new common core. We have to be able to research and come up with ideas to take to them (teachers) to better their teaching.

Variety of Ways Principals Obtain Professional Knowledge

Chantal, a principal with 1 year of experience, discussed her experiences as an assistant principal and the former principal who was her mentor. She stated:

I had a really good mentor in my former principal; he let me participate with the decision making and we worked really well together. I hated to see him leave and if there is something I need to know now, I call on other principals as ask how they would handle the situation. As a vice-principal I had to do that quite a bit with testing because I had never been put in the testing situation as far as overseeing all of it.

Tanya also discussed the other principals in the district as valuable resources for obtaining professional knowledge. She said:

I have learned as a principal; to be a principal in my first year, I had no pride and I asked for help on everything and I learned so much. When you are a teacher you automatically assume what the principal was doing and it's not anything what you think and what you learn in your administration classes when you are getting your degree was nothing to do with what happens in the principal's office. So my biggest resources probably have been in other principals. Just calling and saying, "tell me, help me."

Gabby discussed networking with other principals and her experiences as a college professor in the education department with implementing new policies, standards, and regulations. She said:

A lot of the information, when the state or federal bring down a new rule or standard – I like to communicate with other principals to see what they are doing, what their take on it

is, stay current by keeping updated with what is going on in Nashville, and calling other schools. I like to call other principals and see what you all do, how are you handling this; so communication – and fortunately all my years with teaching at the university, with being in and out of schools – I have a great network.

Becky stressed ways she obtained information through literature and noted that as part of her position as a principal she continues to take classes and participates in leadership programs to learn and grow professionally. She stated:

First of all, a lot of reading with support information, things we get from the state, professional development that we go to. We also do a leadership class, in that leadership class we bring about new things coming about, situations that each of us have and we share ideas and opinions through that class.

Barry discussed that he went through all local resources within the school district and then to state and professional organizations when seeking information and advice. He emphasized consulting with his professional organization when researching legal advice. He stated:

If it is something that I am not familiar with, when I have a question, first I go to central office and talk to the particular person in that area. If it has to do with a title program, I talk to the title supervisor and so on. And then if that is not satisfactory, I will go to the state department and even sometimes I have used Tennessee Education Association information, especially if it comes to law.

Barry followed up with comments about seeking information from the Tennessee Education Association for principals with questions referring to school law. Barry stated:

Yes, I have used them (TEA) throughout the years especially when you come to a situation like zero-tolerance. The zero-tolerance policy – for example, if you have a student with a weapon in school, alcoholic beverage, or issues like that, you can get advice from TEA, and they will give you advice to protect yourself.

Abby discussed the importance of the principal being persistent and maintaining continuous communication with the central office supervisors. Abby stated:

You do not just sit still and let it happen. If you want to be involved I find that if I have little communication with people in central office then I am out of the loop. But if I do not take the extra time to make a phone call even they may not call me but if I take one more step then you have to inquire about the things that are going on about what direction we are going, about what the expectations are going to be; so I feel like again it falls back to that communication.

Barriers that Limit the Principals' Ability to Acquire and Use Professional Knowledge

Another theme the principals expressed in detail are the limitations they have encountered in the use of professional knowledge. Time was a frequent barrier that all the participants discussed and the lack of time affected their specific roles and responsibilities. Gabby discussed the amount of time it took to complete teacher evaluations:

One of the barriers is losing time to evaluations. Even though evaluations are very important, the paperwork and time required to do it takes away from being with the students, watching instruction, dealing with the community, getting involved with stakeholders – because you do not have the time.

Gabby followed up by describing the differences in her experiences as both an elementary school principal and a high school principal. She discussed the differences between the two with funding and professional development primarily directed toward elementary schools. Gabby stated:

As a high school principal we do not get to go to as many professional developments that [are] really related to what we do as we did when I was an elementary principal. As a elementary principal, I was constantly in Nashville, at workshops and training, staying current, knowing the next thing coming out, knowing that something was coming out. At the high school we do not have the money for that. And I miss that because you do not stay as current; it is harder to keep up with what is coming down the pike because you do not have every grant. What we have is the teacher sitting with the student; there is not money in that for professional development.

Chantal continued with her discussion of time barriers associated with teacher evaluations. She stated:

The time factor – there is never enough time to do everything you need to do or feel like you are giving one hundred percent to something. I find myself starting many things and having to stop and do something else. I always have good intentions; like planning for evaluations – you have it down and needing to one and sometimes something comes up and there is nothing that can be done about it. You have to do the best you can.

Abby discussed the regularity of the state department changing policies and the implementation of new programs. She stated:

I am going to use the state here; they are so indifferent about constantly changing it or they implemented it before they had thought it through, so they change in the middle. I feel like that limits our ability to be able to put that professional knowledge to use. Because you are trying to incorporate something into your school that is not completely developed and you speculate if you will. Yes, I can do all the communicating and I want to put all the answers out there. You call the state and what do you get? “Well I am not sure,” “Well let me get back to you.” It limits what is out there and what you can do. Actually the schools, principals, and districts are limited due to these changes. I feel like those programs are not really developed. They are rolling them out before it’s time.

Tanya discussed the effect of the state’s new initiatives and the state running the schools like a business:

I think our biggest barrier is the fact that we have people in the state department that have never been in an actual classroom or being in an actual school and telling us what we need to do. When it is being run like a business than based on children.

Becky expressed a similar perception about the new state initiatives and the frequency of these policy changes. She said, “First of all different changes in the state that come down from the state and that seems like it changes weekly, not just once a year.” Becky discussed the barriers within the school system that principals face:

Also using the professional knowledge you have and you think that maybe you have figured out a situation but then you are stopped midstream from your supervisors that tell you that cannot be done or you should do that or it comes around as political to where you are told, “No.”

Barry pointed out a barrier that a small rural school district has is access to professional development for principals. He said:

Probably the biggest obstacle to those here and our area is access to professional development. If it is offered in Knoxville or Nashville it is a hardship to travel and [cover] accommodations. Our local central office staff does not have the resources or funding to provide a complete, broad choice of professional development.

Professional Knowledge Sources Available in the Principals' School District

Gabby discussed the role of the director of schools and her staff communicating information to the principals. Gabby also discussed the importance of the director's staff using technology and keeping the principals current on information released from the state department.

Gabby stated:

Probably one of the professional knowledge sources is the director of schools; she always sends us to the director's report. We always get information from the Commissioner of Education via email. TEAM supervisor always sends us the TEAM update; she keeps us current on that. I guess the source would be the district people but another part of that source is technology. Being able to get us the email and keeping us current that way. Professional development training – even though, I think the information that is sent to us via email is more often than we are allowed to go to PDs. I guess maybe I do not know if this goes with this question, but as the principal, as a high school principal we don't get to go to as many professional developments that's really related to what we do as we did when I was in elementary principal. As an elementary principal I was constantly in Nashville, at workshops and trainings, staying current, knowing the nearest thing coming out – knowing that something was coming out 2 years from now, constant. At the high school we don't have money for that. And I miss that because you do not stay as current; it's harder to keep up with what's coming down the pike because you don't have. Every grant we have has to be teachers sitting with a student; there's no money in that for professional development.

Gabby discussed her experiences and compared the elementary and high school principal's opportunities for professional development: She stated:

I truly miss that professional development is not as available to high schools. I went last summer to Orlando to the Model Schools Conference. Loved it, but that's one of the few conferences that you can go to and it's always a long way off, it's a big trip, a couple thousand dollars. So they will not give you the money for that, so it's hard to get funding

to go to those things and they're never in-state. School board members will say, "Why don't you go to training in-state?" – because it's not here.

Chantal discussed her perceptions on the role of the director with supporting the principals with tough decisions. She said:

If I am uncertain on how to handle a situation, especially if it is something as far as that could cause a legal issue or problem, I will call the director or the assistant director. To let them know right off this has happened; I have done this and to go through the proper channels to make everyone aware that needs to know what is going on at this level here. And with the variety of students we have coming in here there are issues we have and that even you know that you have been in a school for years or you feel like you have some maturity on you, until you have a situation for that first time, it is never one hundred percent, because it is a learning process.

Abby also discussed how the director and central office staff provide timely communication of information to her and she then communicates relevant items to her teachers and her staff. Abby stated:

Looking at it from that perspective, it makes it hard – it's limited that we have, but if I call a (supervisor), she will do what she can to find the answers and/or she does for me. I think (supervisor) will have the answers and she will. She (supervisor) will call back within the day and or within the hour with the answers. I don't have issues with that.

I'll use our director as an example – the fact that she forwards all those updates. I think that is a big help and I will go one step further unless it's something that will incite an uproar before it's time I will go ahead and send it on to my teachers and then they know what's coming from the top down. It gives them a better understanding that we have this task that we take that and let's find a way to make it happen and again that goes back again to the communication.

Becky discussed her perception of how her leadership class format should overlap into a monthly district principals' meeting as a principal-only group to share and discuss situations that arise within their schools. She stated:

I think we talked about the leadership class that we have but I also and I have for years felt like the principals need a meeting time – not like we have at central office – but among ourselves to just be very informal, let's just get together and talk about different situations happening at each other's school. The best way to figure out anything is to run

it by another principal and get their ideas and maybe that puts a different light on things sometimes we get blinded and don't really see the whole picture but they (district principals) might – may be able to look at it and help make that decision. I think that's very badly needed.

Barry discussed ways he obtained information from outside resources and felt the e-mails of information from the central office was how he received most of the information about paperwork and school accountability in the district; however, he felt as if the principals as a group needed more knowledge to improve academic achievement. He also discussed that the principals received notices of professional developments, but he felt as if the district needed an action plan and to target trainings for principals such as the common core implementation. Barry stated:

Well just to be honest, with the sources available from my district I do not know exactly; every year they dispense information via the internet, through e-mail, and principals' meetings, we get informed of professional development and that's about it. The supervisors work very hard and always find out information I need. They are overwhelmed due to the state department changing and adding programs. Who can keep up with all of the restructuring of education? We need to have a plan to target our students' achievement through curriculum and instruction methods. I have attended all the Reading and Language Arts trainings as well as the Math Common Core trainings through the state with my teachers. And there seems to be more questions than answers that I feel like need to be answered for our teachers.

The data teams that the district mandated back a few years ago has helped for my school. We can now look at our scores and see the strengths and weaknesses and the areas that I need to improve. But the state department, with all of these changes with teacher evaluations, are making it difficult on the teachers and me. I feel like we as principals have to place our first priority on classroom instruction with a solid curriculum as the foundation for student learning.

Variety of Professional Knowledge Sources Used by the District's Principals

Becky discussed that in her school she relies on data, electronic resources, and reviewing literature to improve student achievement. She stated:

I think I have used them all, I think all of us do – data for sure, you know we rely on data so much more. I think back to when I was in the classroom. I was in the classroom for 21

years and data at that point was not shared-test data. Test data was not shared. My principal would say, “Looks pretty good,” or “Looks good,” but it was under lock and key.

It wasn't something that was shared I think. In order to get buy-in with people you have to know where you stand. In order to do better you have to know where you stand so that is used so much in my school and I think most schools.

Professional development absolutely; that's where we get new focus lots of times. Teachers will kind of get comfortable I guess, they need new ideas brought in, kind of get that spark going.

Becky followed up by describing ways she uses technology to access information she needs to help support teaching and learning in her school. She said that she would be using internet searches to help support the teachers with the new reading series the district adopted this year. She said:

Well, of course we use all of those things of electronic sources all of those things to help us gather knowledge if there's, let's take for example, with the new reading series, I'm sure we will be pulling lots of things, trying to see what would work that would go along; let's say if you're doing reading then we would be pulling up that new series and different supplements and different things. So I am constantly pulling from there to help my teachers I am constantly trying to find things.

Abby discussed her school and ways she has implemented data study and professional learning communities with the teachers to focus on improvement. Abby discussed the need for professional development for her teachers and through the data study, PLCs, and surveys so she and her staff can target needed information. Abby stated:

Data, of course, in our county – that has become the push right now. It's making sure that everything reflects the data we have gone through with. We have established the PLC groups within that they are to utilize their data we also have afterschool teachers meeting twice a month. And one of those is the main focus is the use of the data and at that point it's not just grade level teams it becomes subject specific so that they are looking at across the board here's things that we are facing. They are being able to communicate those things to each other. They are being able to identify the school needs at that particular point it changes over, for example, it changes over to algebra at this point; before it was all numbers and operations. They are making those connections seeing then

the next task trying to develop what strategies what do we need to do to target this, so that is a big thing.

Research and literature – we have several that are the go-getters that will actually bring things the things in and will share with the PLC groups. Most of the things are where we are targeting within the PLCs – one of our teachers can tell us about whatever is out there and she will bring it in – she will bring it to the table. Then others will.

Professional development is an area that we need to target that is more specific to more individual needs. I thought last year the way they had it was very chaotic to keep up with it and was more grade level specific than what they needed. I thought that was a big thing. Because that was one thing (assistant principal) and I talked about trying to do – getting things for the teachers that they need for professional development. I know we did the TELL survey online, I know that's anonymous and we don't know who needs what. So I actually took the TELL survey and made our own survey; basically it's word for word on some of it. But, allow them to put down, now I know who is weak in this area [and] now know who needs. They select things they need for professional development and so we use that to identify things that they themselves feel like they need and I think that is a big thing.

Tanya discussed the district's data coach and the data program as a key source of knowledge for her and her teachers. She stated that her staff consists of many new teachers and that a state grant has provided outside professional development for her teachers. She indicated that the data study was being correlated into instructional improvements with the professional development and mentoring the Evans Newton consultants have provided. She said:

In all honesty I think our data coach is a godsend. Because she can put it into perspective, I can look at it and look at it. But she can put it into a perspective as a nonbiased person. And I think she is a huge asset. I make sure that I am that every data meeting. I talk to the data coach; she's coming in and she's part of my in-service next week. She's somebody I feel like I can rely on.

We have Evans Newton here as part of our focus grant. We had a person come in that was a mentor for just my vice-principal and I. And then we had someone that would just work with our teachers and meet with us every afternoon and tell us what she saw and we would go through from teacher to teacher with her and watch and see her perspective as an outsider and that is been huge. And this year if we get the grant back she's going to do all my professional development. They are amazing. Last year 75% of my teachers had at five or less years of experience.

Gabby discussed that she learned how to obtain professional knowledge from a colleague who, when he had a question, he would research the topic on the Internet, find schools and districts that were making progress in specific area, and research the plans they had implemented. Gabby pointed out that many programs have been implemented through grants from the state and stated:

One of the things that I hadn't really thought about, but I learned it from a person I had as a student and they are a principal now in Sevier County. When they want to do something at their school they get on the web and they research a school similar to them – that is very successful, high academics, high financial, they have grants and money. They just go to the website and research that school and see how they did it or what they did.

So that is an electronic source that is also a professional development because, just that in itself, I hadn't thought of about that, but if you want to know what's coming down the pike and how to make things work or which grants are making it work for them go to this school system like Greene County – you know they always have good things going on, the most current things – so get into a school system just pull up their website see what they're doing.

And I'm a little bit of a freak when it comes to test data. So a lot of the information that – even placing my teachers – I'm looking at right now in making some changes with some teachers based on test scores. I'm taking my test data to determine which teachers – their strengths and weaknesses so I know where I need to place my teachers to get the biggest bang for my buck. I know who I have got in my building now; I have to decide which person can give me the most impact for the students.

I think research and literature is something that we do constantly because you're either moving forward or you're going backwards so you have got to be constantly researching and reviewing literature and going forward and you can do that through professional development, through electronics.

I think the mentoring program is a good thing, just to work with other people and I know on the evaluations a lot of times they don't think we mentor but if you're a principal you mentor every day.

Barry stated that he uses school student achievement data, current research and literature, and professional development resources in finding information he needs. Barry discussed that he mainly uses the computer to find professional information and e-mail. He stated:

The data – the data and the data coach sitting down when you analyze your data with the needs of a classroom and even the areas of need with a particular student. Data mining and then of course creating any plan of action and follow that process up.

It has always been beneficial to be up-to-date with current research and current literature concerning curriculum and data. Anytime I see current articles, for example in yesterday's paper, understanding the common core, it gives you a brief concise overview of the common core. Of course I brought in, for example, for myself and the teachers.

Well, all we have here to easily acquire professional knowledge is the local school district and another thing we do have access to your local principals' association – the East Tennessee School Principals' Association – to take advantage of some of the professional development that they offer. I have done some of that in the past and it has worked really good. You know a lot of times if you do that you have the opportunity to have collaboration with fellow principals and other districts – a network of principals that you can communicate with.

Electronic sources – oh my goodness there's a multitude of electronic sources. Going through those and selecting the ones that would apply to your classroom we do practically every day.

The ENA email is very beneficial as far as a good way of communication. That is a very informative way of communication for us because we get information from the state department, information from outside instructional groups, and some of these workshops we went to this summer we get email addresses of fellow principals, and supervisors from other systems that have developed programs.

It's almost overwhelming at times; you have to be selective and if the teacher asked about something you can get on the internet and search it.

I know supervisors who send out e-mails to all teachers on a weekly basis.

Chantal discussed the challenge of being an assistant for several years, moving into the role of principal, and having to be the person to gather information and make decisions for the school. She emphasized the fact that she frequently asked questions of other principals in the district and from outside presenters with whom she has developed a professional network through in-service meetings. Chantal said:

With the data – I didn't meet the data team a whole lot because the principal took that role upon. He met with the data team. When he was not here I sat in on them and I tried to make good use of the data. I meet with the teams of teachers, with their leaders, and sit

in on the data team and discussed what to do to improve scores and going to the TVAAS site; I do that often, as well as the DEA – Discovery Ed.

Electronic sources – last summer when we did the Common Core one of the presenters there – I had emailed him during the school year getting information from him on how they had done scheduling. He had mentioned the block so he and I corresponded with him through email trying to look at things that their school had done; it was Bearden Middle School, but we didn't end up going that route but I did a lot of searches on sample schedules also just trying to figure out if some of those might work for school and just seeing what they had done. It turned out they didn't but, however, that is something I use a lot of to try to find out and asking other professionals within the county for input.

Perceptions of District-Wide Principal Mentoring

Barry discussed ways a district-wide principal mentoring program would help develop the district's principals and compared that program to the district's leadership program that targets aspiring administrators. Barry stated:

I certainly think there is; if I was a young aspiring administrator I would definitely want to have access to a mentor program. Because there is so much you learn from those leaders that have experience and went through the process themselves. They have the day-to-day responsibilities for operating a school. Yeah, I think that is a great thing. I have not been to any of our leadership programs as far as that's concerned but I do think it's a good thing for young aspiring administrators; they need to hear that they need to have an opportunity to ask questions and interact with more experienced leaders.

Tanya discussed her views regarding the need for a principal mentoring program. She discussed her unique viewpoint because she was a participant in the district's leadership program before she became a principal. She added her insight as to ideas that should be incorporated into principal mentoring.

I was part of the program before I became a principal. I feel like that I did learn. And it helped me that I felt like I became more comfortable with the other principals before I became principal. And so I think that's helped my relationships with them. And you see people in a setting that is not as formal as in the school, which I think is a good thing. Where everybody gets to talk and share. I think that to me my favorite part of the mentoring program was when principals give tips. That's my favorite part.

Tanya explained her perception of the leadership program's format of case studies or scenarios being discussed. She said, "I like doing the case studies, but I think it would be more beneficial if maybe they did two different principals. We could meet and bring in a situation that has happened at my school and we could discuss how it could be handled."

Abby discussed her experiences as a participant in the district leadership program, working with the teacher mentors, and ways ideas from those two could provide a foundation for a principal mentoring program. Abby stated:

I feel like there needs to be a mentoring program. I have been able to utilize a lot of the things from the program the way it is and I have several features here that are countywide mentors. The problem [is] that I see what it is and takes teachers out of my building more than I would like, and I hope that will be addressed, and hopefully having mentors within their school as opposed to teachers from here going to another school and that other school would have some that they could benefit from. Does that mean that I mind having mentor teachers in my school, absolutely not? I wish they would do that some other way.

I like the mentor program for the administration for leadership. I would like for utilizing more scenarios and actual giving them tasks that would be – how would you do this so they are actually seeing what's involved within the process as opposed to we spend a lot of time about talking about the order in which we do things and what's involved in great leadership.

I think it's very good; however, I feel like again those things they kind of hear in school courses already and again there's not that real life, here's how a situation is. I know from time to time we will tell a scenario and again that shows the difference in philosophy in how you deal with it, but at the same time I feel like if you're given a budget situation and you have to make a decision for programs you have to choose between this or this, what are you going to do and how are going to resolve which is a better route to go? Those are things that happen in real life and that are not embedded into the school curriculum.

Gabby discussed her perception and experiences as a school leader. She detailed insight between the academic preparation for the principalship and the reality of having served as a principal. She said:

My perception is that we need something that that we can gather and discuss issues and how to handle things and/or new laws coming down the pike. New policies and laws, but

as far as – and I do not want to sound like a know it all – but there are very few people in the district that’s had more experiences than I have. That could not, I mean, I’m not saying that I could learn something but.

I think experience is – too many times we have someone trying to do a presentation that they saw somewhere else that they didn’t experience it. If someone is going to tell me how to be better at what I do, I want them to have done it. I do not want to know that they read a book. If it’s gotta have rigor and relevance, they need to have done it. Don’t tell me how to have a good school if you’ve never been a principal.

I do not know if that helps your paper or not. I hate those people that read a book and then all of a sudden they are a professional and they’re doing training because they read the book. I can read a book on how to build a car but I can stand in the garage but it does not make me a car.

Gabby discussed her perception of the contents of an effective mentoring program for the principals in the school district. She said:

I think a mentoring program would need to have a group of principals, not necessarily just from our county but surrounding counties, have some type of a program where three or four could go together and sit down and maybe have each month to have a topic of conversation and even if somebody presented, but have a topic, a specific topic that whether it be a new law, a new policy, a new procedure, a new program, how it works and share with each other ways to become better, ways to make things more efficient. Because most of us don’t have money and time and how do we and other schools make it work. I actually learned more at professional development as an elementary principal when I went to TASL credit from the people setting at the table that I didn’t know than from what I learned at the presentation because they would sit and talk about things that they were doing in their school. Real-life examples – for example one of the guys was talking about how he couldn’t get his athletes to go to tutoring because they had ball practice after school so he couldn’t get them to go to tutoring; so what he did was he took morning tutoring as soon as they got off the bus – the athletes had to go to tutoring – automatic, they’re captive. They get off the bus go to tutoring, don’t let them wander around – they were assigned to be there. And faculty meetings he did 30 minutes times during the day. Everybody had a common 30 minutes once a month that he did faculty meetings so they did not have to stay after school.

I took that idea and had my teachers – I divided up my grades and like eighth grade might read to kindergarten and kindergarten might read to eighth and I would have teachers’ aides and maybe a few subs be with the kids while we had a 30-minute faculty meeting at 12 o’clock. And that way the meeting you can’t bird walk; it keeps you focused, you do not get all those stories, they stay on task. The meeting lasted 30 minutes and then nobody had to stay after school.

I learned more from sitting at the table – just open discussion. I think that would be good to have people from different communities from different school systems to work together like that, different principals.

Becky described her experiences as on-the-job training right out of her classroom when she first became a principal. She related ways she relied on other principals to advise her regarding questions and situations that she had to handle early on in her principalship. Becky discussed her view of an internship for new principals to work under a veteran principal for a year. Becky stated:

Absolutely, I think we definitely need that; I know when I came into the principalship, I guess I formed my own mentors. Because I started with people I knew personally and I call constantly to say, “I’ve got this situation I think I need to do and what do you think?” And maybe if I didn’t know what to do I think we do that now I think we call on each other a lot, but if new principals coming in had a designated mentor. In fact I feel like, and I always have, before you can become a principal I think you need to work under a principal and have like an internship for a year and that way you’re side-by-side, you know exactly what’s taking place. Because a lot of people go in blindly, right out of a classroom; I came into that right out of the classroom. I did not have a clue as to all the problems you would encounter and there’s many, so I think that a year’s mentorship is a must. I think you would be so much better prepared.

Perceptions of Teaching and Learning

As the principal of her school, Gabby discussed her focus as being the instructional leader of her school. She emphasized the importance of curriculum and data to drive instruction.

Gabby stated:

One of the things that I did this year – I took the test data and at the very beginning of the spring semester I took fall test data, did faculty meetings, did it during their planning times, so I had to present four times. I just set up a room that they could come to on their planning time and I did a presentation.

I analyzed our data with a gap analysis of the Fall (test scores) so we could see how big the gap was and where we needed to be for the spring and what we needed to work on. Also we talked about curriculum and programs that we needed in the way we needed to teach to move to Common Core. As a principal you have to be an instructional leader, this day and time or you won’t make it; you just can’t be a business office person. You have to focus on the curriculum; you got to use the test data to drive instruction in the

curriculum. You have to use the data to place your teachers. And you have to have teacher buy-in. They have to be able to see that it is a team effort.

Abby discussed her belief that teacher assistants help promote academic programs in her school. She affirmed her supporting role for her teachers in the teaching and learning process with the new common core and her school's professional learning groups. Abby stated:

I go on the philosophy that my teachers need to be informed. I am a diehard fan for the buy-in and the teachers having ownership – that seems to be if you can get the teachers on board with the Common Core or whatever the state is throwing out there. It's a lot easier; one of the things I hear – I have teachers that are fighting, or they are revolting against this or that, certain programs. Do I have teachers that don't necessarily like it? Sure I do. But if I said, "Let's meet after school anybody that wants to help such as such," then I'll have the majority of my teachers there because they know that their voices will be heard. I feel like my role is more of a support. I like you know if it has to come down and I have to say this is how it is – I can do that.

Abby indicated that as a support for her teachers she searches out information for them.

She stated:

I will give them this and then they will go from here and will establish today the PLC groups, to know who can be working on the handbook is going to be working on certain things in the PLC groups. Because I feel like I tell them constantly, I do not know everything and I can't think of everything; that if you take several minds and put them together then more is covered. Most of the time the groups will work because it benefits them in the long run.

Barry discussed ways he promotes teaching and learning in his small rural school. He explained how he is able to observe classrooms frequently and provide instructional advice for his teachers in order to assist them with improving their lessons. Barry stated:

The teaching part – I visit classrooms daily, monitor the curriculum and what the classroom teacher is doing and how they present lesson plans and how they execute their lesson plans and things such as that. If I think of anything that I can help the teacher with as far as adding to her curriculum or her lesson plans I assist with that. We are so familiar with each other at my school; we are such a small school. For example Miss so-and-so in the first grade, I will say you may need to expand on phonetics because these kids are like us they really do not have the phonetic teaching at home.

Chantal explained her perception of being a new principal and the effect of the recent changes in education due to reforms from the state department on teaching and learning. She said:

Everyone is under so much pressure with testing; everyone feels like that is all we do anymore and pretty much that's what we are doing. We are always getting ready for a test and that's what people look at and judge a school on, whether it's accurate or fair or not it is just the way it is.

Just the importance of using that instructional time not wasting time – it's just like the director of schools said, it's teaching from the beginning of the period to the end of the period. Just because we're going to have more time for classes doesn't mean it's time for study hall; it's instruction time, time on task and the classroom management. If they do not have good classroom management they are going to start off behind and the teachers will have a disadvantage from the beginning because they are giving up power of their classroom.

Tanya discussed teaching and learning from her classroom experiences. Tanya recently came from the classroom with over 20 years of experience in the elementary and high school levels. Her viewpoint as a principal on teaching and learning is grounded from the teacher's perspective. She said:

In all honesty, I hope that I do not lose my perspective as I go on as a principal because since I just came out of the classroom a year ago and I have not forgotten how these teachers feel and I feel that is probably a whole lot to do with what I know and what they are going through.

Becky discussed her role in student placement as a key to teaching and learning. She emphasized the needs of the students and strengths of her staff to place students strategically where she feels they will be most successful. She said, "I learned very quickly that even though we do mostly ability grouping, that with some students that does not always work; teacher personalities and students personalities are very important." Becky explained that she matches up her teachers strengths with the content they teach. She said:

And I think it is very important to know the expertise of your faculty. For example you may have a grade level – like right now my second grade seems to be the lowest achieving. I am even looking at doing instead of being self-contained to departmentalized and get to their specific area of expertise. I think maybe one of them does great with math and their students do well with math but maybe their students do not do well with reading so I am only going to have two classrooms in second grade so I am thinking about switching that and having one do science, social studies and math and one do the language arts.

Perceptions of Leadership and Management

Gabby explained how the principalship role is directly correlated to leadership and the management of her school. She discussed her perceptions of the differences between leadership and management and how she leads her teachers. Gabby said:

I think your faculty and staff has to see you as a leader; they have to believe in your leadership, they have to realize that you're the leader. I want to be fair, I want to be good to them, but I also want them to know that I am still the person in charge. Leaders have to make tough decisions, but it always has to be what's good for the school. Whether it be let a teacher go, whether it be to move a teacher, whether it be reassignments within your staff. I had to do a little of that this past year because people retiring, and leaving and move some other folks around getting people in the right area to use their strengths; as the *Good to Great* book says, "getting them in the right seat on the bus." They are on the bus, I just have to get them in the right seat – and management. As far as the management part of it, I think as a principal you have to realize it is a business, it's not personal, it's a business. If we worked at Clayton Homes it would be a business. We would be looking at our product to make sure we could sell it and it was a quality product; the student is our product. So if we are not producing a quality product then we go to figure out what to do to fix it. You have to look at the management side of it as a business.

Barry discussed his views on the difference between leadership and management. Barry said:

They have connections between them of course; however, there is a difference. Leadership is inspiring your teachers. Moral support; make sure they have everything they need in the classroom to improve their teaching and carry out their duties. And I think management, in my view, is more or less keeping the teaching environment in a school in a positive way, keeping your schedules, giving your teachers a good quiet learning situation.

Becky explained how she interacts with her teachers and how she uses sensitivity to promote her leadership through management of her staff and students. Becky said:

It is nothing but total management. You manage adults, you manage students, not much difference. It's just one's a little older than the other. As far as the faculty and staff you're going to have some of the same issues like I said; knowing how to deal with it and you have always have to go in and be a listener and you have to listen and not be judgmental. Just let them know that you are listening to what they've got to say. Lots of times by the time they leave after they have said it then they have figured it out themselves; lots of times but for the most part, I think having a compassionate ear. Sometimes teachers come in here with baggage too; they come in here with family problems, they come in here with sickness, they come in here with lots of things just like we talked about with our students coming in and sometimes they go through divorce. I had four this year that went through divorce. So it plays a part on how they feel that day, just like with the kids. The main thing is to be open and having an open door so that they can come in and talk to you and it will be okay.

Chantal indicated her philosophy as a principal is to be a team leader. Chantal stated:

Something that I have always tried to guide myself with in the classroom and then my role became here in the office; I would never ask anyone to do something that I'm not willing to do myself. You have got to let people know that you are in there with them and that you are not trying to control them that you are part them, you are one of them and we are all in this together. It is for the students and you've got to know the way you set the tone with your faculty as a way that they are going to react. You cannot go in and talk down to them and telling them, "Hey I am in charge and you are going to do what I say;" instead you have to first approach it to gain teacher buy-in and as a team effort.

Abby also discussed her role as a leader in the management of her school. She indicated that she strives to place an emphasis on a positive learning environment for both teachers and students and her decisions are centered on maintaining a student-centered environment. She stated:

Again, I think all that goes hand-in-hand. I feel like that teaching and learning – if the students are happy that the teachers are happy, and that everybody believes in what they're doing then we will move forward. As far as leadership and management – that's what I tried to portray; I want them to understand that they will be heard and we will look at it and see what we may. If they need something in the classroom, bring it to me and we will do everything we can to come up with it. You can ask; go through this building – "If I need a new computer then principal will do everything she can to get the new computer

to go in that classroom. She may ask what it will be used for and that it's going to cost \$2000, then it's going to be used more than once a month." If it's reasonable and it's feasible it's coming, just about every decision we make is based on that.

Findings

This section is a discussion of the findings related to each of the research questions.

Research question 1 was: What do principals in this school district consider as professional knowledge?

The participants in the study report that they sought information from a variety sources to implement in their decision-making process. The principals' pursuit of knowledge correlates to Ackoff's (1989) framework of the human mind that relates to the principals' perceptions of data, information, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom in their pursuit to make informed decisions. The principals remarked that they studied student assessment data, frequently read research and literature pertaining to education for information on specific topics, and rely heavily on other educational professionals gain knowledge to answer specific questions.

The participants in the study presented a wide range of experience within the principalship, and three of the principals stated that "on the job experience" is a critical factor in professional knowledge. The participants perceptions of their "on the job experiences" through their pursuits of gaining knowledge is an example of building tacit knowledge. Polanyi (1966) discussed the framework for tacit knowledge as having a valid knowledge of a problem with the capacity to pursue the problem and determine the implications of the discovery in the end. The principals interviewed for this study remarked that data was one of the key elements of professional knowledge that they implemented in their schools. The principals expressed their perceptions that the individual schools data teams and the district's data coach assisted each

principal in making instructional, personnel, and curricular decisions to promote student achievement.

Three principals said that they sought knowledge from research and literature and discussed ways they provided this information to their teachers. The principals' perceptions of research and literature was positive and they reported that they consistently gathered and read research and literature to assist their and the teachers' needs. Biddle and Saha (2002) found that principals view research knowledge positively, regularly are exposed to information about research, retain a good deal of that information, and actively implement the knowledge in their schools.

All of the principals have implemented professional learning communities within their schools. These PLCs were reported by two of the principals to be very effective in researching questions that the teachers had with respect to curriculum and instruction. The principals also stated that the PLCs were effective in helping their efforts to support the teachers with the new implementation of the Common Core. These examples are grounded in Sergiovanni's (2006) work with his synthesis of leadership and management. The individual principals professional practices to attain knowledge nurtures professionalism.

Research question 2 was: What interferes with or limits these principals' ability to acquire and use professional knowledge?

The participants interviewed for this study remarked that the recent state department reforms have resulted in barriers to the acquisition and the implementation of professional knowledge. The principals were in unanimous agreement that the current environment of the constant changes through the state department have made their jobs very difficult. The participants explained their perceptions of these changes and ways they have adapted to seeking

information. They feel that they are in a frequent mode of having to address changes in policy, testing, and curriculum delivery that has created barriers to the use of professional knowledge. One example of this is the implementation of the Common Core that all of the participants mentioned as both a challenge from understanding this shift and as a challenge to provide specific information and knowledge to their teachers.

The effect of these changes is reported by the principals to have placed a burden on the teachers and themselves with respect to establishing a stable instructional environment for the students in their schools. The recent state reforms directly correlate the pressure Tennessee school principals have to analyze their students assessment data constantly and make decisions throughout the school year; the participants discussed this in detail throughout the study. Danielson (2002) indicated that data study has to take place on a regular ongoing basis. This is a unique barrier that the principals face as evidenced by their remarks regarding ways they continue to seek data knowledge while the reality of state reform forces them into high stakes testing and to align the curriculum to testing while directing teachers to instruct toward testing goals.

The principals interviewed reported that the lack of time is a limitation in their ability to acquire and use professional knowledge, and half of the participants noted in detail that time was a key factor in their roles as principals. All principals reported that they use networking and communication with other principals to overcome time obstacles. Bechtel (2007) discussed the correlation between a principal's ability to provide leadership to affect student achievement directly competes with a principal's time to complete administrative tasks.

Another barrier reported in this study was accessibility to professional development and the alignment of professional development to the needs of the specific principal. This barrier can

also be related to the district being a small rural East Tennessee district where several of the principals are somewhat isolated from professional development opportunities. This situation is a reality for an isolated rural region; working in a district that lacks adequate funding for the principals to participate in certain professional development opportunities that require travel limits these opportunities.

Research question 3 was: What supports or extends the principal's ability to acquire and use professional knowledge?

All of the principals stated that the director of schools and the supervisory staff support them in various ways. Each principal discussed the positive role that the central office staff plays in assisting them with obtaining information they requested. All of the principals mentioned the director of schools and their experiences with the director as being positive and helpful. Fullen (2002) discussed the effect of well-established relationships as continual resources. Several of the principals revealed their perceptions of the professional relationships with specific people who provided support to the principals to acquire and use professional knowledge. These professional relationships are vital to the school principals' effectiveness as described in Standard Six of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (2001) that discusses the school leader' ability to understand, respond to, and maintain influence over the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context in order to be effective.

Several of the principals spoke about their positive experiences with helping one another and that as a group the principals frequently communicate with each other. One participant explained that the principals and the district could improve communication even more by adopting regular monthly face-to-face principal-only meetings. The principals presented several examples of implementing networking with a variety of stakeholders but especially with a focus

on the network within their group of district principals. The study found that as a group the districts' principals are very supportive of each other.

Several of the principals explained their experiences with using outside resources for professional knowledge. Four participants talked about various ways they use outside resources. Professional development was a frequent topic of discussion by the district's principals, and several reported frequently accessing state and national professional organizations and associations. The importance of the district's principals' ability to gain professional development extends their professional craft knowledge. This is the key theme related to Standard Two of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (2001) that states school leaders should advocate, nurture, and sustain a school culture and program that is conducive to student learning and staff professional development including professional development for principals. However, McCay (2001) warned principals that professional development within the technical aspect of their job is not sufficient and that school principals should focus on developing active learning, reflection, and leadership.

Outside colleagues that the principals meet through various academic settings, professional development programs, and vendors through grant programs were reported as significant human resources the principals saw as strong supporters for professional knowledge.

This collegial environment promotes the communication within a variety of modes including networking between the principals and outside educational professionals, e-mailing, central office staff dispersing information, and the principals' readings of educational research and literature.

All six participants of this study spoke about their positive experiences with the district's data initiative. The principals reported that they participated in data training, received support

from the district data coach, participated in the school data team meetings, and made instructional, curricular, and personnel decisions based on their schools' data.

Research question 4 was: What are the principals' perceptions of the need for a district-led formal mentoring program in order to be a more effective school leader?

All participants explained their perceptions of the district leadership program and the positive effect that it has for its members. This annual program was established for teachers and administrators to have a leadership study and the state approved the program participants as eligible to receive TASL credit. Five of the study participants were involved in the leadership program. Two of the principals participated in the leadership program before they were promoted to the principalship. They revealed their experiences from this program as being very helpful when they came into the school leadership role. They also explained their struggles as first-year principals and how a district mentoring program could have been a support for their transition into the principalship and overall success as a school principal. Malone (2001) found that more school districts are implementing the expertise of their senior administrators by adding mentor programs into the mix of training for beginning principals.

The principals described the need for the district to establish a principal mentoring program. Two of the principals stated that a program would be beneficial to new principals and that a year of having a veteran principal assigned to them would have assisted them with a wide variety of situations that school principals face. The principals revealed their perceptions of various components that could provide the foundation of a principal mentoring program that would be beneficial. Holloway (2004) outlined ways mentoring programs provide collegial support that new principals need.

The principals explained the difference between university administrative preparation programs consisting of “textbook theory” and what they saw as a need for interaction with veteran principals to discuss real-life situations and scenarios. One principal suggested that the district should establish a first-year principal internship. She added that the new principal should be paired with a veteran principal in the district. However, to accomplish this a district-wide principal mentoring program would have to be established.

Another principal suggested the need to involve principals from other districts to lead sessions. Those who participated in the leadership program discussed taking the useful components from that program, such as case studies and real life scenarios, and building a district-wide principal mentoring program. Duncan and Scott (2010) suggested that in order for both new and experienced principals to be effective instructional leaders, promote professionalism, and use data to drive decisions, principals need coaching in those specific skills. School principals can promote professionalism through their leadership within the school. Principals who promote professionalism set goals and opportunities for themselves and their staff to continue to attain skills in education, such as teaching and leading, making decisions based on good judgment and the use of polite behavior.

Summary

Several themes emerged from the analysis of the perceptions that principals from one rural East Tennessee School district have about professional knowledge sources and barriers they face in acquiring those sources. The principals explained a variety of ways they obtain professional knowledge and described barriers that limit their ability to acquire and use professional knowledge. The principals discussed the knowledge sources available in their school district and described ways they benefited from leadership mentoring. The principals

discussed their perceptions of a district-wide mentoring program and suggested possible components that could assist in the development of this type of mentoring program.

The principals described their experiences with teaching and learning as well as their perceptions of leadership and management.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine what sources of professional knowledge are available to principals in one rural East Tennessee School district. Individual interviews with six current practicing principals who volunteered for the study were conducted after permission to contact the administrators was granted by the director of schools. Perceptions about the principals' sources of knowledge and information that principals shared about their principalship experiences were gathered and analyzed.

Analysis of interview transcripts revealed the perceptions of the principals' experiences with professional sources of knowledge in the rural East Tennessee school district where they serve as school leaders. Eight themes were identified after interview transcripts were examined and coded. The eight themes were: (a) variety of principals' perceptions of professional knowledge, (b) variety of ways principals obtain professional knowledge, (c) barriers that limit the principals' ability to acquire and use professional knowledge, (d) professional knowledge sources available in the principals' school district, (e) variety of professional knowledge sources used by the district's principals, (f) perceptions of district-wide principal mentoring, (g) perceptions of teaching and learning, and (h) perceptions of leadership and management. Recommendations for future practice were also developed from the research.

Summary of Findings

Sources of professional knowledge are critical factors in the support of public school principals. This study was focused on a small rural East Tennessee school district, and the principals shared their various principalship experiences. Experience is a factor that all principals

addressed, and the participants' experience as school principals varied from two first-year principals to one participant who had 21 years of experience.

The principals expressed positive experiences with the use of data, and they discussed ways they used data in their schools. All of the principals noted that "data knowledge," working with data teams, and the district data coach provided them with sources of knowledge that assisted them in making decisions that have improved student achievement in their schools.

The principals were persistent in expressing the support that the director of schools and her staff have provided. They stated that communication has been positive, frequent, and helpful between the director and supervisors in assisting them with questions, decisions, and professional knowledge.

The principals described their experiences with professional development as methods to acquire professional knowledge and that the director and supervisors promoted the principals' involvement in these activities. The principals shared ways they used research and literature to assist them with instructional and curricular decisions. The principals indicated that they took time to read professional educational research and literature on a frequent basis as a way to research programs and answer specific questions for their teachers.

The principals discussed their concerns with barriers to obtaining professional knowledge. The two areas that the principals expressed as concerns were time and the current state department educational reforms. The changes directed by the state department emerged as a barrier for the principals and ways they addressed these changes were discussed. The principals noted that time barriers such as having to complete teacher evaluations and having frequent questions from their school's professional learning communities pertaining to the new Common Core initiative.

The new principals described ways that a district-wide principal mentoring program would benefit new and veteran principals alike. They described possible program strengths and limitations and provided recommendations for a program of this type in the future.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to assess what sources of professional knowledge are available to principals in one rural East Tennessee school district. Each principal was interviewed to gather information about professional knowledge sources, the barriers they experienced in obtaining professional knowledge, the supports that aided them in gaining professional knowledge, and their perceptions of a district-wide principal mentoring program.

The participants' interview data provided rich material that emerged into answers for three overarching questions and the conclusions to these questions. These questions have their foundation in Ackoff's (1989) study of the human mind.

1. Do the district's principals use knowledge to answer "how" questions?

The findings from this research have enabled me to conclude that the principals use knowledge to answer "how" questions. The participants provided in-depth accounts of their experiences of ways they seek knowledge they need in order to answer a large variety of professional questions they encounter in their roles as school leaders. The participants' perceptions varied as did their diversity in experiences and years within the principalship. The participants' interviews provided examples of seeking knowledge and information from data sources, collegial professionalism, readings of research and literature, and professional development. The principals presented evidence that they embrace teaching and learning within their roles as school principals. They strive to answer questions from their teachers and resolve issues that they face in their roles as principals. They implement professional learning

communities in their schools, they implement networking in a variety of ways, and have positive working relationships with each other as well as with the district's supervisory staff and director. The principals provided accounts of an intense determination to answer difficult questions.

2. Do the district's principals appreciate "why" in developing their understanding?

The findings of this study have enabled me to conclude that the principals have not fully developed an appreciation of "why" in the development of their understanding of the answers they seek. Several of the participants touched upon this critical point of understanding when discussing their experiences and perceptions of data-driven decision making within their own schools. The discussions of their experiences, frustrations, and perceptions of the state reforms and the barriers these reforms have imposed on the principals can possibly emerge into a theme of the principals' developing their understanding of the reforms through their own questions of these reforms.

However, there was little discussion of "why" the state department leaders are implementing specific programs and policies. These "why" questions could lead to a further understanding by both principals and teachers through discussion within their respective professional learning communities. The principals provided rich discussion of the concerns they have over the state department's reforms. They provided evidence of ways they are adjusting to these changes through implementing PLCs, data teams and increased data study, increased focus on student testing, efforts to maximize their time management, and their reliance on one another as a support network. However, there was little discussion of the principals asking themselves, "why" these changes are occurring, what are the forces behind the changes, and what are potential implications? This is specifically what McCay (2001) discussed when he said that principals should focus on developing active learning, reflection, and leadership.

3. Are the principals developing a sense of wisdom?

The findings of the study have enabled me to conclude that the principals are developing a sense of wisdom. The participants provided examples of specific sources of knowledge that they use on a daily basis. However, these accounts went further in providing evidence that they are developing wisdom. Several of the principals referred to professional development, personal resources, reading research and literature, experience by doing, and informal mentoring from other principals on whom they rely within the district. One principal discussed how she placed students through a process of matching students and teachers by personality types. This is evidence of the principal implementing qualitative data through her observations of both students and teachers. These are examples that provide evidence that the principals are developing wisdom as Sternberg (2007) discussed. The district's principals provided evidence that they are developing their own understanding through the use of all professional knowledge sources. The principals provided examples of their reliance on and support of one another, support through the director, and data study including both qualitative and quantitative data. These are examples that provide evidence that as a group the district's principals are developing their own understanding, tacit knowledge, and wisdom around the questions they seek to answer.

The study showed that the principals develop and rely on collaborative and trusting relationships with their peers and find these relationships to be the most significant sources of knowledge. Each principal discussed data and ways both qualitative and quantitative data were incorporated into student placements, school's professional learning community's discussion topics, and teacher placement. This data study can also be correlated to the school principals' pursuits of professional development within data study for themselves as well as their teachers. The participants confirmed through their interviews that the priority on data was due to the state

department reforms with an overall focus being placed on student achievement. The key barriers the principals discussed were the state department reforms and the resulting obstacles from these reforms. Examples the principals discussed were common core, teacher evaluations, and the increase time devoted to student testing.

The study revealed that the participants found electronic sources of knowledge less significant. The principals discussed the frequency of electronic communication through e-mail between themselves, their peers, and central office staff, and they discussed the types of communication they receive. For example, most of the participants stated that they receive the state department updates consistently and the director of schools forwards information on a regular basis via e-mail. However these interview discussions provided evidence that the principals' e-mailing should be considered a tool rather than an actual source of knowledge.

The conversation with Principal Redmond (D. Redmond, personal communication, November, 2007) provided a framework for the study, and the synthesis of the findings enabled me to draw conclusions of the principals' perceptions of the knowledge sources they use. There is a direct correlation between the principals' understanding of knowledge, how it relates to their ability to make informed decisions, and the attainment of wisdom (Ackoff, 1989).

Recommendations for Practicing Principals

The results of this study suggest the following recommendations for practicing principals:

- Communicate with other principals and central office staff in the district.
- Develop professional networks with principals and administrators within the district as well as outside educational professionals.
- Develop close collaborative, trusting relationships with peers.
- Promote professional learning communities in your school and actively participate in these.

- Engage effective use of all knowledge sources including quantitative data (test scores etc.) and qualitative data (feedback from teachers, students, and parents and principals' observations).
- Plan for effective use of time and develop time management skills.
- Participate in professional development opportunities and communicate with district administration the professional development activities that would benefit your needs.
- Engage in professional readings in educational research and literature.
- Seek assistance from outside professional education resources and peers as needed to answer "how" questions.
- Reflect on the answers you find through collaboration with peers.
- Seek an understanding of the questions you have and the answers you find through collaboration with peers.

Recommendations for University Educational Leadership Programs

- Meet with district principals often and use feedback from principals as a source for program improvement.
- Develop a cooperative internship experience between the university and district for aspiring administrators. For example the principal preparation program at East Tennessee State University requires a 540-hour internship supervised by university personnel and a trained principal mentor.
- Assist the district in the development of a district-wide principal mentoring program.

Recommendations for School Districts

- Develop a district-wide principal mentoring program for both new and veteran principals.
- Develop collaborative efforts between the university administrative preparation program and the school district to improve principal preparation and new principal mentoring.
- Encourage principals to be active learners, to reflect on decisions they make, and to participate in district-wide leadership activities and programs.
- Provide and promote continuous communication and support for the district's principals with the central office staff.
- Develop collaboration among principals with frequent meetings for principals only.

- Encourage veteran principals to serve as mentors.
- Challenge principals to value teachers' tacit knowledge received as feedback.

Recommendations for State Department

- Support and provide assistance to state university educational leadership programs in the development of both aspiring and practicing principal programs.
- Support and provide assistance to school districts in the development of principal mentoring programs.
- Through a collaborative effort between the SDE and school districts provide support and assistance in the development of specific principal professional development programs.
- Remove obstacles that interfere with principals' professional development (provide districts funding for programs).
- Implement qualitative data (feedback from teachers, students, parents, and principals' observations) in the development of state programs.
- Support principals in the use of qualitative data in their pursuit to develop effective learning programs within their schools.
- Support school principals, teachers, and district leaders to enhance a focus on teaching and learning and decrease the emphasis on student testing and accountability.
- Consider a collaborative effort between all school stakeholders in the development and implementation of new state educational programs and policy reforms.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of principals within one rural East Tennessee school district sources of professional knowledge. Six practicing district school principals were interviewed for this study. The following are recommendations for future study:

- Study variation of principal knowledge needs at each of the three levels (elementary, middle, and secondary).

- Study of the district's director and the district's supervisors' perception of their roles in the support of the district's principals.
- Study the effect of district-led mentoring programs.
- Study outcomes for principals who participate in mentoring programs and those who do not.
- Conduct a case study of school principals' active learning, reflection, and leadership activities that principals gain through their pursuits of professional knowledge.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter to the Principals

To: Current school principals in the county system

From: Early Perkins

Date:

Re: Research

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and currently completing my dissertation entitled, *School Principals' Sources of Knowledge*. I have received permission from your director, _____, and authorization from the Institutional Review board to conduct this study.

I would like to ask you to complete an initial survey in which six principals will be chosen to privately share your perceptions of the sources of knowledge that you use in your principalship role in a face-to-face interview. Your perceptions will be compiled in my dissertation and shared with your central office staff as a way to help continue building the effective leadership and mentoring for administrators program. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. All information shared with me will be coded and protected. Any use of quotes will be assigned pseudonyms and you will have the opportunity to review all information for accuracy before completion.

If you are interested please respond to me at perkinse5@k12tn.net or call me at 423-494-4976. If you have any additional questions please do not hesitate to ask. Attachments include the Informed Consent document and the Principal Survey form. You will have one month to respond to the survey.

Sincerely,

Early Perkins

112 Farris Circle

LaFollette, TN 37766

APPENDIX B

Principal Demographic Questionnaire and Survey

This survey is confidential. Completion of this questionnaire and survey will provide the researcher an assessment of the school principals' demographic data and perceptions of the need for or value of general sources of professional knowledge. If you have any questions you may contact me at perkinsa@goldmail.etsu.edu.

Principal's Name

Name of School

Number of years that you have served as a school principal

Gender

Year that you completed your administrative studies

Number of years as an educator

The highest degree you have attained

Grade levels your current school serves

Student population of your school

Utilizing the rating system defined below, please circle the number that best reflects your perception about your professional experiences as a school principal.

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly Agree

1. As a result of my principalship experiences, I believe that professional knowledge is important. 1 2 3 4

2. As a result of my principalship experiences, I recognize the need for or see the value in a district-led formal mentoring program. 1 2 3 4

3. As a result of my principalship experiences, I have experienced barriers to acquiring professional knowledge. 1 2 3 4
4. As a result of my principalship experiences, I recognize the need for or see the value in research and literature as sources of knowledge for school principals. 1 2 3 4
5. As a result of my principalship experiences, I recognize the need for or see the value in understanding and applying data as sources of knowledge for school principals. 1 2 3 4
6. As a result of my principalship experiences, I recognize the need for or see the value in professional development as sources of knowledge for school principals. 1 2 3 4
7. As a result of my principalship experiences, I recognize the need for or see the value in electronic resources as sources of knowledge for school principals. 1 2 3 4
8. As a result of my principalship experiences, I recognize the need for or see the value in human resources as sources of knowledge for school principals. 1 2 3 4

APPENDIX C

Principal Interview Protocol

1. What professional knowledge do you have?
2. What do you consider as professional knowledge?
3. How do you obtain information you need in your role as school principal?
4. What interferes or limits your ability to acquire and use professional knowledge?
5. What supports or extends your ability to acquire and use professional knowledge?
6. What are the professional knowledge sources available in your school district?
7. What is your perception of the need for a district-led formal mentoring program to become a better leader?
8. When you need professional knowledge, do any of the following sources play a part in getting the information you need? Can you provide any specific examples of these sources that you have applied to decisions in your principalship role?
 - A. Data
 - B. Research and literature
 - C. Professional development
 - D. Electronic sources
 - D. Mentoring
9. Discuss how you use information about teaching and learning in your role as principal?
10. Discuss how you use information about leadership and management in your role as principal.

APPENDIX D

East Tennessee State University
Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Document
School Principals' Sources of Knowledge
Arland Early Perkins

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to discover what principals in one East Tennessee school district as understand as knowledge, their perceptions of a district-led formal mentoring program and their barriers to acquire and use professional knowledge within their role as school principal. This study addresses a small rural school district in specifically addressing 10 school principals in what they consider knowledge and the sources of knowledge they draw from within their decision making process in their principalship role.

DURATION: The principal questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes. The principal interviews will take approximately one hour.

PROCEDURES: I will conduct a short questionnaire with 10 district principals and chose six for face-to-face interviews. I will tape the interviews and take notes during and after each interview. Any use of quotes will be assigned pseudonyms and you will have the opportunity to review all information for accuracy before completion.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS: There are no alternative procedures or treatments with this study.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. The participants may choose to not answer any questions or choose not to participate in this study.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: This research will gain and present an understanding of the participant's perceptions, strategies, and characteristics and develop common themes that exist with the group of principals within a small rural Tennessee school district.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions, problems, or research related problems at any time, you may call Early Perkins at 423-494-4976. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423-439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to

talk to someone independent of the research team or you cannot reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 423-439-6002.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The researcher will make every attempt to keep your study results confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in the Principal Investigator's locked filing cabinet for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The researcher will publish the results of this study in a dissertation. The researcher will assure participants that their names and direct quotes will be anonymous. Although the researcher will maintain your rights and privacy, the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education and Leadership and Policy Analysis will have access to the study records.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: My participation in this research is voluntary. By signing below, I understand that I may refuse to participate at anytime and without any penalty. I confirm that I have read or had this document read to me. I will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. I have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss my participation with the investigator. I voluntarily chose to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

SINGATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

DATE

APPENDIX E

Letter to Director of Schools

Dear Director _____

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and currently completing my dissertation entitled, *School Principals' Sources of Knowledge*.

I would like to permission to survey 10 current principals. I will contact these principals by e-mail and only those who are willing to volunteer and respond accordingly will be contacted after the initial e-mail. I plan on selecting six principals for face-to-face interviews. All information, such as the names of the principals, schools, and school district will be confidential.

My study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of ETSU; a copy is attached for your records. Please feel free to contact me by phone at 423-494-4976 or through e-mail at perkinse5@k12tn.net.

Sincerely,

Early Perkins

112 Farris Circle

LaFollette, TN 37766

Approval:

Signature

Date

VITA

ARLAND EARLY PERKINS

Education: Ed. D., Educational Leadership
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN 2014

Education Specialists Administration and Supervision
Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN 2006

M.A. Educational Administration and Supervision
Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN 2005

B.A. Social Sciences
Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN 1991

Public Schools, Campbell County, TN

Professional Experience: Principal, Claiborne County School System
Powell Valley Elementary School
Speedwell, TN
2005 to Present

Teacher, Claiborne County School System
Powell Valley Elementary School
Speedwell, TN
1993-2005

Teacher, Claiborne County School System
Powell Valley High School
Speedwell, TN
1992-1993