

The Principal Internship Experience: Leaders for 21st Century Middle Schools

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to investigate practicing middle school administrators' experiences during their principal internships and their perspectives on how well the internship prepared them to be leaders of schools with high minority and/or high poverty student populations.

Principal preparation programs build a knowledge base for graduate students teaching them educational leadership history, pedagogy, and philosophy in a generalized sense. The internship is a component of the program. Combined, the programs for future principalships may or may not facilitate the development of principals ready to lead schools with high poverty and/or minority student populations. Recent studies place an emphasis on well-designed internships with collaboration between universities and school districts. Studies of educational administration preparation students have shown that students know the importance of mentoring and describe their needs for more experience. The study will deepen our understanding of the education of school administrators and help to strengthen the preparatory programs that train future school leaders. This research will also focus on perceived twenty-first century concerns from the participants and how well prepared they are to handle the issues.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Preparation to be a principal is an ongoing process confounded with ever-changing student and teacher needs, accountability standards, policies, and programs that need to be addressed by those preparing future school leaders. Many researchers have examined principal preparation programs and instructional leadership but seldom do researchers investigate either the internship component of preparation programs or the pernicious issues of preparing leaders for schools with high minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. Fry (2007) reported snapshot data of the ethnic and racial composition of public schools educating the nation's pre-kindergarten through 12th graders. In his analysis of public school data since 1993-94, Hispanic enrollment has increased modestly after there has been a decline in the enrollment of the white public school. More than 55% of the increment has been observed in the Hispanic population of public school. In 2005-2006, 19.8% of all the population (student) of the public school was Latino (Fry, 2007; Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2010). Additionally, Fry (2007) reported that, "Whites now comprise a smaller share of the students in the public schools; white students are now more likely to be exposed to minority students" (p. i).

In the state of Texas, the Texas Education Agency compiled a report for statewide enrollment. The report states that the public schools of Texas served an increasingly diverse population of students between 1987-1988 and 2009-2010. In particular, the greater cultural and linguistic diversities were brought to the state by the

Hispanic population's rapid growth (Texas Education Agency, 2010). The report continues to state that the largest percentage (48.6%) of total enrollment was of the Hispanic students in 2009-2010, which was followed by the White students (33.3%). When looking at the economically disadvantaged student breakdown, the report stated the 2009-10 amounts were 58.9% of the total enrollment of students. These statistics are alarming and call for attention from instructional leaders to ensure a quality education for these populations.

Cunningham and Sherman (2008) state, "Growing criticism of existing educational leadership preparation programs seems to focus on a lack of contextual relevancy and instructional leadership" (p.309). They continue in their research and discuss internships as

...centered on tasks such as faculty meetings; student discipline; scheduling; home-school communication; budgeting; procedures, policies, and laws; school plant concerns; developing reports; testing; arranging substitutes; facilitating school- community relations; and monitoring extracurricular activities. For a principal intern, although these are crucial tasks, they support instruction only indirectly. All these tasks are not enough in this age of accountability. An emphasis must be placed on tasks that facilitate student achievement, school improvement, and instructional leadership – nonexistent aspects of the internship or historically overlooked. (p. 310)

Anast-May, Buckner, and Geer's (2011) current study provides insight into practicing principals' views of the types of experiences and activities that future educational leaders should have in their preparation. Their research concludes, "Aspiring principals need opportunities to lead change efforts, build relationships with staff and utilize data to support school improvement efforts" (Anast-May, et al., 2011, p. 4). The emerging themes in their study, after analyzing the interview data, were:

planning change in areas of curriculum and teaching, supporting cultures of learning, and using data to support continuous school improvement.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has brought accountability of student achievement to the forefront and added pressures on school administrators. This reform (NCLB) requires that all students perform at a proficient level in reading and math by the year 2014 (107th Congress, 2002). Ramalho, Garza, and Merchant (2010) point out, “This mandate (NCLB) lacked adequate federal, state and local funding, and disregarded the challenges associated with the significant difference in students’ cultural and socioeconomic conditions” (p. 35). Data from student achievement confirms disparities in student performances in schools serving low-income families (Fry, 2007; Ramalho, et al., 2010). Additionally, higher concentrations of Hispanic and Black populations in schools have difficulty performing academically acceptable (Ramalho, et al., 2010). David Karen (2008) states, “I suggest that we think about the issues surrounding the outcomes of individual students in terms of the social structure of injustice” (p. 18). Karen (2008) adds,

In thinking about why children perform differentially, we need to examine the larger patterns of resource distribution in the society: unequal access to medical and dental care; unequal access to housing; unequal access to labor markets and adequate incomes; unequal access to vibrant communities with high levels of social capital; and yes, unequal access to educational (preschool, too!) resources. (p. 19)

A recurring theme emerging from this research is that internships are not preparing administrators for their expanded responsibilities, challenges, and accountability.

## **Background of the Study**

Where can we start work to deepen the understanding of the education of school administrators and to strengthen preparation programs that train future school leaders? In an era of accountability, preparation programs must be reformed as a part of a social justice plan.

When looking for articles and research on principal preparation programs and the internship as it relates to the development of principals ready to lead schools with a high poverty and /or minority student population, it is sparse and hard to come by. From the research I have collected thus far, most of the articles discuss preparation and internships in a general sense but do not break it down in topics of high poverty and/or minority student populations. Murphy and Vriesenga's (2006) article states, "Between 1975 and 1990, approximately 3% of the articles in some major magazines aimed administrator pre-service training. Since then, more than 11% of the articles have attended to training issues. During the previous period, less than 1% of magazine space was devoted to empirical work on preparation programs. Since 1990, nearly 4% of the articles in these journals have been devoted to empirical studies of manager pre-service training" (p. 188).

The majority of the research stipulates changing the principal's role, not necessarily the principal preparatory program or internship component. Kevin Butler (2008) states, "According to a 2006 survey by Public Agenda, a research organization nonprofit that reports of public opinion and public policy issues, nearly two-thirds of

the principals felt that typical graduate leadership programs "are out of touch" with today's realities"(par. 3).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to investigate current middle school administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of their internship experiences as they relate to working with populations of high minority and high poverty students and if these internships prepared them for the principalship in schools with these populations. It is important to prepare aspiring administrators with skills necessary to lead schools effectively, and it is the charge of the universities and the mentoring school districts to do so. Villani (2008) states, "Now more than ever, new principals need mentoring and coaching from their experienced colleagues" (p. ix). She states that there is a crisis of leadership in the United States because the U.S. Department of Labor projects 40 percent of principals are nearing a retirement age (Villani, 2008). Aside from managing the everyday operations of a building, school administrators perform a myriad of duties. Robbins and Alvy (2003) remind us of some of the educational topics a principal must address: state and national standards, data-driven decision making and high stakes accountability, teacher supervision and accountability, professional development, brain-compatible teaching practices, social and emotional learning, IDEA, ethical leadership, information technology, crisis management, and working with the media. Aspiring school administrators rarely emerge from their principal intern collegial program fully ready for the challenges that await them as new administrators (Kersten, White, & Trybus, 2010). When working

with the student in the internship, Miller and Salsberry (2005) report it is the responsibility of the student and the mentor to craft internships that support the transition to administrative duties, therefore, engaging students in the change paradigms leadership requires.

Many disparagements from critics are placed on principal preparation programs voicing their belief that principals are not being prepared to lead in today's educational system. Stevenson, Cooner, and Fritz (2008) discuss Arthur Levine's (2005) report in which he criticizes current principal preparation programs:

...many university-based programs designed to prepare the next generation of educational leaders are engaged in a counterproductive 'race to the bottom,' in which they compete for students by lowering admission standards, watering down coursework, and offering faster less demanding degrees. (p.10)

Fry's (2007) report on the changing racial and ethnic composition in U.S. public schools describes a "demographic shift with an increase of more than 55% in the Hispanic slice of the public school population since 1993-94" (p.1). With the growing population of minority students, practitioners need to understand the culture and background of the ethnicities. Additionally, the rise in the number of children in poverty has contributed to making our nation's classrooms more diverse than ever before. In Ruby Payne's (2005) book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, she states, "While the number of Caucasian children in poverty is the largest group, the percentage of children in poverty in most minority groups is higher" (p. 6). "Poverty is considered a major at-risk factor" (Leroy & Symes, 2001, p. 45).

The need for reform of preparation programs and internships for aspiring principals is crucial. Preparation programs and internships are designed to arm future principals with skills necessary to lead schools effectively with the countless concerns attached to them. According to Levine's (2005) report, "The job of school leader has been transformed by extraordinary economic, demographic, technological, and global change" (p. 11). Additionally, he stated, "Schools have the job of educating a population that is experiencing dramatic demographic changes, growing increasingly diverse, and becoming more and more segregated by income and race – to meet today's more rigorous state standards. And they must do so with a shrinking number of experienced administrators and teachers due to retirements and departures from the profession" (Levine, 2005, p. 12). The lack of empirical research on principal internships that involve working with high populations of minority and poverty students validates the need and rationale for the focus of this study.

### **Purpose of This Research**

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to examine the experiences of middle school administrators' principal preparation and internships and how well the programs prepared them for schools with high minority and/or high socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. This research study surveyed and interviewed existing administrators in the public school setting about their experiences related to their preparation program and internship. This comprehensive, in-depth analysis of their internship experiences will add to the principal preparation knowledge base. Preparation programs tend to create an infrastructure with history, pedagogy, and

philosophy in a generalized sense, but whether or not they facilitate the development of principals ready to lead schools with high poverty and/or minority student populations is questionable. This qualitative study examined the experiences of certified school administrators in middle schools in the Central Texas area. Participants' academic preparation for certification was examined, including university coursework and field experiences. To shed light on the problem, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What were middle school administrators' internship experiences related to working with high minority and/or high poverty populations?
2. What factors of the middle school principals' internship were instrumental to the success of the middle school administrators working with high minority and/or high poverty populations?
3. What theory emerges that explains the value of principals' internship experiences to work successfully with high minority and/or high poverty student populations?

### **Overview of Methodology**

An inductive, grounded theory design was utilized for this study. This qualitative research design allowed the researcher to focus on collecting and analyzing the data and also allowed the researcher to look for emerging themes that generated a theory. Through this study, the researcher attempted to better understand the value of the internships of the participants. It allowed the researcher to interpret the meanings of the experiences for the individuals in the study. Data was collected from surveys

and interviews from the participants. The interviews were transcribed to provide rich description for the study. This permitted the researcher to look for patterns and commonalities in the perceptions of the participants' experiences.

### **Data Collection.**

The researcher used the Region 13 Educational Service Center and Texas Education Agency to acquire a list of schools in the Central Texas area. After that, the researcher used the websites of the schools to obtain email addresses and phone numbers and contacted possible participants by sending an email with an invitation to participate in the study. Once a participant responded to the invitation, an interview was conducted and transcribed. Consent was asked of the participants to collect the data and personal information. Participants also participated in a nine question survey on Survey Monkey requesting background information about their educational history. Additionally, all information was confidential and pseudonyms were used to protect their identity

Data gathering methods for this study included non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and email and telephone interviews. A digital recorder was used, and data was transferred to the computer for transcription.

Surveying and interviewing the participants was the best way to acquire the answers to the research questions. An initial email was sent to the potential participants of the study that met the study criteria. Once participants replied with their intent to participate in the study, the researcher sent them an email with a link to Survey Monkey asking general background, educational, and job information. The

researcher also set up an interview time and place with the participants. Once the surveys were analyzed, the researcher began to write the descriptive data for the study. Additional interviews were not needed for clarification of data. The use of frequency counts will help to determine emergent themes.

The researcher also installed and utilized the computer software program QSR NVivo. NVivo allowed the researcher to collect the data of the transcriptions and organize and analyze the content.

### **Data Analysis.**

Hatch (2002) states, “Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories.” Data analysis involved coding or “chunking.” Once coding was complete, the researcher prepared reports by summarizing the prevalence of codes, focusing on the similarities and differences in related codes across original contexts, and comparing the relationships between the codes. The researcher purchased QSR NVivo software to help perform rapid analysis and summarize findings quickly. This software provided security by storing the database and files of the interviews. It enabled the researcher to manipulate the data. Member checks of the analysis were used to decrease the chances of researcher bias.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study examined the experiences of certified school administrators in middle schools in the Central Texas area. Participants’ academic

preparation for certification was examined, including university coursework and internship experiences. Research questions guiding this study are:

1. What were middle school administrators' internship experiences related to working with high minority and/or high poverty populations?
2. What factors of the middle school principals' internship were instrumental to the success of the middle school administrators working with high minority and/or high poverty populations?
3. What theory emerges that explains the value of principals' internship experiences to work successfully with high minority and/or high poverty student populations?

### **Research Assumptions**

Based on the researchers' background and experience as a middle school administrator working in a school with both large populations of minority and economically disadvantaged students, three assumptions were made regarding this study. First, it is assumed that the participants answered the questions honestly. Second, the researcher assumed that having previous experiences as a teacher in those populations assist in transferring to the administrative role and aiding them to be successful with those populations. Last, the researcher assumed that many of the internship activities are neither applicable nor meaningful to aspiring administrators ready to take charge of their own schools with high minority and poverty populations.

### **Researcher Perspective**

The researcher has been employed as an administrator in a middle school for

ten years. Both schools where she worked had a large population of minorities and economically disadvantaged students. At the time of her internship, her principal assigned her to intern under the assistant principal. Many of the tasks asked of the researcher during her internship were trivial responsibilities such as working minor discipline infractions, covering duties for games, and attending department meetings. The researcher felt the assigned tasks were not meaningful.

The researcher, after working as an administrator for seven years, ironically, was charged with the responsibility of having an administrative intern to train. The intern was a teacher in the same school where the researcher was an administrator. The researcher knew that the intern, as a teacher, was not strong in neither curriculum nor classroom management. As a result, the researcher already had a predisposed attitude toward the intern. The researcher did not have a lot of trust in the intern to make sound decisions and represent the school appropriately. As a result, the researcher gave the intern the very same types of tasks as her intern supervisor chose. The tasks were trivial and did not need a lot of supervisory assistance.

With that said, the researcher feels that she has done a disservice to the intern as well as the preparatory program and university from which she came. Because of the researcher's experiences as an intern and a supervisor of an intern, the information gathered by the researcher can be of assistance to other researchers in future studies about principal internships and working in schools with high populations of minorities and economically disadvantaged students.

## **Limitations**

By researcher design, this study was limited to participants in the Central Texas range, confined to Region 13 Educational Service Center area. Participants for the study had to be an administrator in a school with high populations of minority and poverty students. The researcher set criteria that at least 50 percent of their school's population had to match those two student populations. The aforementioned limitations produced a small number of willing participants for the study. This study focused on middle school administrators in the Central Texas area, specific to Region 13's Educational Service Center. This purposeful sampling decreased the generalizability or transferability of the findings. The interview itself was a limitation. Participants may have misunderstood the interview questions and skewed the findings of the study. As with any qualitative research, the researcher is considered a limitation. The researcher serves as the data collection instrument (Creswell, 2009). Thus, the data collected and analyzed was subject to bias as it is reflected within the researcher. As the researcher in the study, I bring my own personal bias based on my own educational experiences with my internship.

## **Definition of Terms**

- *Internships*: any official or formal program to provide practical experience for beginners in an occupation or profession.
- *Instructional Leadership*: those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning.

- *Principalship*: is one who holds a position of presiding rank, especially the head of an elementary school, middle school, or high school.
- *School leadership*: is the process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, pupils, and parents toward achieving common educational aims.
- *No Child Left Behind*: (NCLB) a federal law passed under the George W. Bush administration. The law reauthorized federal programs meant to hold primary and secondary schools measurably accountable to higher standards. It also provided more opportunities to parents for school choice and placed a greater emphasis on reading in schools.
- *At-Risk*: Refers to students who are at-risk of either failing specific courses or failing to graduate, usually caused or influenced by their current home, family, or economic situations, as well as academic. Examples: not promoted to next grade, did not perform satisfactorily on state assessment, was placed at an alternative education program, was expelled, dropped out, a student that is limited English proficient, homeless, on parole, probation, or deferred prosecution, pregnant or is a parent.
- *Hispanic or Lantino*: A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
- *Low socioeconomic status*: (SES) qualifying for federal free or reduced lunch based on income and number of dependents living in the household.

- *Economically disadvantaged*: is someone who comes from a family with an annual income below a level which is based on low-income thresholds according to family size published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, adjusted annually for changes in the Consumer Price Index.
- *Achievement gap*: the difference between the highest scoring group of students and the lowest scoring group of students.
- *Middle School*: A school with no grade lower than 5 and no grade higher than 8.
- *Title I*: a program that provides financial assistance through state educational agencies to local educational agencies and public schools with high numbers or percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic content and student academic standards.
- *Social justice*: people in a society are physically and psychologically safe and secure. There is an equitable distribution of resources and educational opportunities.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher introduced and briefly discussed background information pertaining to the role of the principal, principal preparation programs, and the internship component as well as pertinent information about concerns for growing populations of minority and poverty students in schools. The role of the principal was also discussed and included the need for more aspiring leaders. This study is organized to reflect five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, background of

the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the research, and overview of the methodology, including data collection, analysis, researcher perspective, limitations, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 will include an in-depth study of the literature as well as the history of principal preparation programs and internships. This review of the literature will support the need for more empirical studies on principal preparation programs and the internship as it prepares leaders for schools with high minority and poverty populations. Chapter 3 will explain in detail the methodology used for the study. Chapter 4 will report the findings of the data analyses. Chapter 5 will disclose the grounded theory and a summary of the findings along with implications for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents a summary of the research related to principal preparation programs, principal internships, and working in schools with high minorities and high poverty populations. The rationale of this review was to provide insight into previous research pertaining to principal preparation and internship programs as they relate to preparing administrators to lead schools with high minority and poverty populations.

#### **Changes and Challenges**

“Over the past century, we have progressed through many educational reform eras. During those eras, the role of school leaders has been redefined. With each new definition, a number of books, articles, and publications, written by various authors representing different paradigms, offer processes and procedures to clarify the roles and responsibilities advocated by the new definition. Yet, schools continue to struggle, and some writers and researchers believe that it is because today’s school leaders are ill-equipped to manage the challenges that they face” (Hoachlander, Alt, & Beltranena, 2001; Levine, 2005; R. L. Green, 2010, p. 2). The principal of today is no longer equipped with the knowledge needed to improve the education of tomorrow’s learners. Regardless of the number of theory of education courses and curriculum education courses an aspiring administrator takes, it will not prepare a new administrator for the first weeks and months of being a new principal. Even veteran principals in the position for years have difficulty keeping up with new trends, policies

and laws, and the ever-changing curriculum standards. The principal of today is the instructional leader, counselor, mediator, cheerleader, business manager, community figure, and expert juggler who wears many hats at one time. The principal should be able to multi-task and prioritize, but this is not always the case.

A great deal of attention has gone into the topic of preparing leaders for schools. While the amount of research has increased, only a small amount of the work has been empirical and limits the field's ability to use the research to reform the practice (Young, Crow, Murphy, & Ogawa, 2009). Preparing leaders for schools has gone under the microscope and a great deal of scrutiny. Murphy, Young, Crow, and Ogawa (2009) point out,

Critiques built an image of a system of preparing school leaders that was seriously flawed and that was found wanting in nearly every aspect, including (a) the ways students were recruited and selected into training programs, (b) the education they received once there – including the content emphasized and the pedagogical strategies employed, (c) the methods used to assess academic fitness, and (d) the procedures developed to certify and select principals and superintendents (Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988; Murphy, 1992). Moreover, critics have gone as far as characterizing these shortcomings as contributors to and, in some cases, 'as a major cause of dysfunction in American public schools' (Baker, Wolf-Wendel, & Twombly, 2007, p. 190). (p.2)

It is no secret that the demands of today's educational leaders have increased over the years. Let's say you are a first-year principal and just received your keys to the building. You go to your office, sit in your chair behind your desk and now what? Tena Green (2009) stated the first thing a principal should do is assess the situation. This is logical but encompasses a huge list. The author included a list of tasks that seem very overwhelming at first glance:

- implementing educational programs and curriculum development

- observing teachers in the classroom
- understanding legislature of the state, district, and community
- dispersing monies where needed
- building relations with the community
- hiring personnel
- providing professional development for staff
- creating a safe school environment
- maintaining discipline standards (Green, 2009, p. 16-17)

To continue, Green (2009) also stated some “necessary elements” that a principal should do are to establish good relationships with all students and teachers as well with parents and the community; attend extra-curricular activities; promptly reply to emails, phone calls, and letters; and be supportive of school culture (p. 19). The role and demands a school principal must endure continues to grow as well as the stress that comes with being an instructional leader and change agent for the best.

Lashway’s (2002) article, “Trends in School Leadership,” discussed the standards that guide the work of school leaders. He stated, “With the nationwide emphasis on standards-based accountability, it was inevitable that reformers would propose standards for educators themselves” (par. 4). There are standards that school leaders are expected to use to help guide them in their job as a principal. These standards are called Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Lashway (2002) stated, “The ISLLC standards are premised on the centrality of student learning as the measure of educational success” (par. 5). The author continued

his discussion with reference to a new advanced certification that will recognize expert leadership: “Under the proposal, administrators would earn advanced certification through an exhaustive regimen of tests, simulations, portfolios, and self-analysis” (Lashway, 2002, par. 7). This model of certification would serve as a nationally recognized distinction from the state licensure. Tena Green (2009) stated, “The ISLLC standards are moral agents and social advocates for the students and the communities they serve. These standards are used for valuing, honoring, and caring of the individuals in the educational community” (p. 53). The ISLLC standards are not adopted nationwide but are widely used as guidelines for restructuring principal preparation programs.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has put an increasing amount of pressure on administrators with accountability in place. Lashway (2002) quotes Katy Anthes (2002) on NCLB, “The Education Commission of the States, in analyzing how the No Child Left Behind Act will affect leaders, noted that they not only need a sophisticated understanding of assessment, they should be master teachers so assessment data can be used intelligently” (cited by Lashway, 2002, par. 10). Additionally, Brown (2006) pointed out that regardless of the students’ social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, to reach high academic standards will require greater leadership skills on the part of the principal.

With the additional demands on principals of today, early retirement and switching professions are more prevalent: “Many managers are not able to meet the growing demand and the resulting tension. Exhausted, he withdraws into silence.

Many who remain are increasingly tired” (Brown, 2006, par. 4). Darling-Hammond and Orphanos (2009) add, “Long hours, state and federal mandates, school board politics, extra paperwork, and low compensation have conspired to create waves of retirement and high turnover, with fewer candidates eager to fill job openings created as principals leave” (p. 3). In an article on the Education World website, Ellen R. Delisio (2009) stated, “The idea of a ‘super principal’ who can do everything and be everywhere must be replaced with another model for administrators – or else talented principals will continue to burn out and no one will be willing to replace them”(p.1). Additionally, she said, “Veteran principals sometimes resent that the younger ones are committed to working fewer hours, but that is something current principals need to accept” (Delisio, 2009, p. 2).

### **Preparation Programs**

According to Young, Crow, Murphy, and Ogawa (2009),

Critiques have focused on the following problems: the indiscriminate adoption of practices untested and uninformed by educational values and purposes; serious fragmentation; the separation of the practice and academic arms of the profession; relatively nonrobust strategies for generating new knowledge; the neglect of ethics, social justice, and other issues considered key to effective leadership preparation; and the concomitant failure to address outcomes. (p. 4)

One of the biggest criticisms of leadership preparation programs is that they do not reflect the realities of the workplace (Hess & Kelly, 2003; Young, et al., 2009).

Principals consistently report that the best way to improve training is to improve the instruction of job-related skills (Young et al., 2009). According to Martin’s (2009) study, when looking at attitudes, values, and beliefs about the principalship, “Faculty at a southeastern public university has observed that a weak disposition often has a

direct impact on the success of the internship. Likewise, employers of our graduates also indicate that graduates who struggle in their first administrative position often do so as a result of weak dispositions” (p. 2). Furthermore, a report by Hale and Moorman (2003), with support from the Illinois Education Research Council, found, “Managers across the country agree that the administrator training programs deserve an ‘F’. In a survey of education leaders conducted by Public Agenda, 69% of the directors who responded indicated that traditional preparation programs’ leadership were ‘out of touch with the reality of what it takes to run today's schools’” (p. 5).

Research by Linda Darling-Hammond and Stelios Orphanos (2009) states, “School leadership is a key factor in recruiting and retaining quality teachers, quality education, in turn, profoundly influenced the improvements in learning student achievement” (p. i). Darling-Hammond and Orphanos (2009) have done extensive studies on preparing and supporting principals in California. The researchers state, “The educational leadership landscape shares many characteristics with many features of the teaching force a decade ago: the lack of potential, a fragmented system, little data, and implications for teaching and learning, and in particular for the closure of achievement gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" public education system” (Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2009, p. 2). They also stated that principals do not receive the “necessary resources, preparation, or mentoring that would expand their capacity” to the increasing demands (Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2009, p. 3).

School leadership is the key to school improvement. If this is the case, are principal preparation programs doing their part to ensure the leaders of tomorrow’s

schools are ready for the challenges they will face? Typical preparation programs are formulated around educational theories on leadership and administration, school law, school finance, discipline, human resources, school improvement, community relations, and curriculum. Some of the programs are face-to-face with the instructor and some of the programs are on-line. Some of the programs are cohort-based, while others are individualized. Some of the students in the classes are hand-picked by district leaders, while others enter the program on their own accord. Marlow Ediger (2007) states, “Coursework should definitely relate to actual duties and responsibilities of working in the public school setting” (p. 149). Hale and Moorman (2003) add, “The general consensus in most quarters is that programs preparing them (with some notable exceptions) are too theoretical and nothing to do with the daily demands of contemporary directors. The coursework is poorly sequenced and organized, making it impossible to scaffold the learning” (p. 5). Preparation programs tend to create an infrastructure with history, pedagogy, and philosophy in a generalized sense, but whether or not they facilitate the development of principals ready to lead schools with high poverty and/or minority student populations is in the eye of the beholder.

Murphy and Vriesenga’s (2006) research states, “Very little study has been directed toward entire sections of the preparatory landscape. Specifically, we know very little about issues ranging from how to recruit and select students trained in the programs and monitor and evaluate progress. There is little empirical evidence on the education of people who educate prospective school leaders in the U.S” (p. 187). They continue, “There simply is not much research on the preparatory function in

school administration and the research we do have does not seem to be sufficiently powerful to drive change efforts” (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006, p. 189). Their (2006) analysis researched school leadership preparation programs in the United States. They turned their attention to the question of how research on the preparation of school leaders can inform efforts to strengthen the preparation function. They recommended seven areas of research to be beneficial to the preparation of principals:

1. Research on the landscape of preparation
2. Research on the reform agenda of the last 15 years
3. Research on effective preparation programs
4. Research on alternative designs for preparation
5. Research on program outcomes
6. Research on the context of preparation programs
7. Longitudinal and comprehensive research on specific domains of administration preparation (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006, p. 189-192)

Additionally, the researchers state, “We need a comprehensive analysis of the state of the field and we need that analysis to reoccur at regular intervals so we can see how and why the preparation function is developing” (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006, p. 192).

The Wallace Foundation found evidence from multiple studies in *How Leadership Influences Learning* that pointed to three broad sets of leadership practices linked to improving student learning and that make up the essence of the new paradigm of successful school leadership: setting directions (vision), developing people (effective practice and support), and redesigning the organization (shared

vision and strengthening the culture) (Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Louis, & Anderson, 2004). The authors write, “There is still much to be learned about how leaders can successfully meet the educational needs of diverse student populations. But there has been a great deal of research concerning both school and classroom conditions that are helpful for students from economically disadvantaged families and those with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds”(Leithwood, et al., 2004, p. 9). Their review of the evidence leads to three conclusions about successful leadership and their influences on student achievement:

1. Mostly leaders contribute to student learning indirectly, through their influence on other people or features of their organization
2. The evidence provides very good clues about who or what educational leaders should pay the most attention to within their organizations
3. We need to know much more about what leaders do to further develop those high-priority parts of their organization (Leithwood, et al., 2004, p. 13-14)

A conference report from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) described a core message as, “Schools must have directors who can start raising student achievement his first day at work. The SREB Leadership Initiative supports a network of universities as they redesign leadership programs to emphasize problem-based learning and field experiences” (Norton, 2002, p. 1). Gene Bottoms, to the audience at the Kentucky International Convention Center, said, “Right now, we have a hit-or-miss system of leader selection and preparation. You may be lucky enough to get a good one, but where will your next one come from?” (Norton, 2002, p.1). “If

university leadership programs expect to prosper in education's high-stakes environment, they have to convince skeptical school systems that they can produce graduates who can lead schools to greater levels of achievement" (Norton, 2002, p. 5). Norton continues, "Most individuals who enter school leadership preparation programs today select themselves. Universities and districts must work together to identify and select only the people who are most likely to meet the demands of the job" (2002, p. 8). With this said, leadership preparation programs need to be reformed. Anyone can manage a school, but not everyone can lead.

When reading a review of research in the Wallace Foundation's School Leadership Study, *Developing Successful Principals*, the researchers disclose findings of not only a shortage of highly qualified principal candidates but also concerns with the unbalanced distribution of competent candidates in suburban and affluent communities. In some areas of the country, highly qualified administrators are not committed to working in underserved areas and districts (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005).

As the role of the principal becomes more demanding, on-the-job training is more critical: "Principals themselves are among the first to agree that they need to be more effectively prepared for their jobs. All but 4% of practicing principals report that on-the-job experiences or guidance from colleagues has been more helpful in preparing them for their current position than their graduate school studies. In fact, 67% of principals reported that 'typical leadership programs in graduate schools of

education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today's school districts” (Farkas et al., 2003, p.39; Hess & Kelly, 2003, p. 3).

Another important study that is widely referenced in principal preparation studies and reform is from authors Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, and Orr. In *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs* (2007), the authors declare, “New expectations for schools - which teach successfully a wide range of students with different needs, while constantly improving achievement for all students - usually means that schools must be redesigned rather than simply manage. It follows that managers should also need a sophisticated understanding of organizations and organizational change. Moreover, when approaching the school funding change, managers are expected to have rational allocation of resources that can improve student performance” (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007, p. 1). For this study, the researchers, using qualitative methods for gathering their data, examined eight exemplary pre- and in-service principal development programs. They interviewed program faculty, administrators, participants, graduates, district personnel, and teachers. They also reviewed program documents and observed in the field during meetings and workshops. Additionally, they utilized surveys (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007). Their finds were:

1. Exemplary pre- and in-service programs share many common features (curriculum, philosophy, student-centered instruction, instructional strategies, support, targeted recruitment and selection, well-designed internship

2. Exemplary programs produce well prepared leaders who engage in effective practices
3. Program success is influenced by leadership, partnerships, and financial support
4. Funding strategies influence the design and effectiveness of programs
5. State and district policies influence program designs and outcomes (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007, p. 5-18)

The researchers add, “It is possible to create systemic learning opportunities for school leaders that help them develop the complex skills needed to lead and transform contemporary schools”(Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007, p. 24).

Young, Crow, Murphy, and Ogawa (2009) point out two forces that have surfaced over the past decade of research: “the creation of alternative avenues for licensure and the growth of alternative providers of programs leading to licensure. Currently it is unclear whether the introduction of such alternative providers will result in program improvement or if it will drive a race to the bottom” (p. 13). They opined, “It is possible that shifting norms in universities in general and in colleges of education in particular may be responsible for some of the increased attention to program reform. Specifically, at least three forces operating in education schools may be directing, or at least facilitating, program improvement: (a) the increased emphasis on enhancing the quality of instruction, (b) outcomes focus of national accreditation, and (c) the demand by many colleges of education that meaningful connections to practice be established and nurtured” (Young, et al., 2009, p. 14). These researchers

look at the findings from Murphy and Vriesenga (2004) as well as four journals (*Educational Administration Quarterly*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, *Journal of School Leadership*, and *Planning and Changing*) to make the following conclusions:

1. There is not an overabundance of scholarship in the area of administrator preparation.
2. Work in entire domains of administrator preparation is conspicuous by its absence.
3. The contours of school leadership are only weakly shaped by empirical evidence on preparation programs.
4. The amount of scholarship devoted to administrator preparation is expanding.
5. The methodological scaffolding supporting empirical studies has been expanded, yet it is not clear that quality has been greatly enhanced.
6. Dissertation work comprises a small but not insignificant proportion of published research.
7. There is almost no evidence of external support for empirical research on preparation programs. (Young et al., 2009, p. 16)

Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, and Levy studied 19 hand-picked principals as they were assigned to a high-poverty, low-performing school in Virginia. The study focused on principals' skill as diagnosing problematic areas of the school and ascertains why those areas needed assistance. The authors stated, "We have adopted

an inductive research design in which we rely on the principals to describe the conditions in their own words” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Duke, et al. 2007, p. 7).

There are a few theoretical frameworks apparent in the research. Ironically, just as a teacher must differentiate lessons and teaching style to accommodate the varied learners in their classroom, the principal must have a differentiated leadership style to accommodate the varied situations that appear on a daily basis. In the most recent study from the Learning From Leadership Project (2010), *Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*, the researchers stated, “The effects of school leadership directly influence school and classroom conditions as well as the teachers themselves, and indirectly affect student learning. Other factors influencing school leaders are derived from interest groups - including the media, unions, professional associations and community leaders - and leaders of professional and personal experiences” (Louis, et al., p. 7). Their framework dealt with types of leadership: collective leadership, shared leadership, and distributed leadership. Other frameworks apparent in the research are Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Model and Fiedler’s Contingency Model. These frameworks were both acknowledged in the Duke et al. (2007) study, *How Comparable are the Perceived Challenges Facing Principals of Low-Performing Schools*.

The participants or programs in these studies were purposefully, rather than randomly, chosen. Certain programs studied were chosen because of their success. It would be very interesting to see a collective analysis of every educational leadership program, but that would truly be cumbersome in nature. The majority of the other

studies the researcher read were primarily qualitative methodologies. This allowed the researcher leeway in clarifying answers to the questions in the study; they used open-ended interview questions to pull rich, detailed data for analysis. When looking at studies, the researcher did not see any mention of preparation programs that trained participants in strategies to help minority and socioeconomically challenged students (with exception of the Duke, et al. study). In particular, there was no discussion of training in English Language Learners strategies or at-risk populations. The researcher would like to see whether or not preparation program studies and internships are generalizing special programs and demographics or if they are targeting these areas of concern.

### **Internships**

When reviewing the literature on the development of educational leaders in respect to principal preparation programs, the internship component, and the development of principals ready to lead schools with high poverty and/or minority student populations, many areas of concern come to mind. Unfortunately, the majority of the literature focuses on generic principal preparation programs. The latest research literature on principal preparation programs and the internship component specifies needed reform in order to prepare leaders for tomorrow's schools. Well-known studies from researchers such as Darling-Hammond, Orr, Levine, Hale, Moorman, and many others have brought administrative preparation programs to the forefront in search of reform.

Principal candidates in preparation programs are not always allowed the critical hands-on experiences needed to tackle the challenges of twenty-first century schools. Fleck (2007) states that universities prepare a solid background for principals, but the “practical experiences are just as valuable.” He maintains that “few principal preparation programs require a full-semester internship, much less a full-year internship”(Fleck, 2007, p. 28). Experiences in the field are usually limited to before or after school or during periods of preparation. Furthermore, "Many of these experiences are limited in scope and depth. In addition, most major field experiences are limited to their own principal as opposed to teacher-training classes that require experience in several buildings with different age groups and levels and with different professionals” (Fleck, 2007, p. 30). Hale and Moorman (2003) add, “Because clinical experience is inadequate or absent, students do not have mentoring opportunities to develop practical understanding or competence in the real world of work” (p. 5-6). Painter (2001) describes the internship as a significant learning experience but it truly depends on the supervising principal. She states, “Most interns have no idea of the constant demands and interruptions that principals must contend with” (p. 45). It is apparent that roles need to be clearly defined, along with certain checklists for the intern and the supervising principal, during the internship process.

The SREB report on principal internships stated there is “an apparent disconnect between the work of today’s principals and the university preparation they receive” (Fry, Bottoms, & O’Neill, 2005, p. 3). The report found that many of the internships studied “failed to provide authentic leadership opportunities.” The authors

discuss the findings in this report from a study that involved surveying aspiring principals in university leadership programs. The findings show a lack of opportunities to engage the participants and prepare them for today's principal role as well as a disconnect to the work. The researchers discuss, "Quality internships demand careful planning, coordination with local school systems, and close supervision by knowledgeable experts who have a track record as successful school leaders. Quality internships cannot be accomplished during 'seat time' in a university room" (Fry, et al., 2005, p. 3). The findings of their study are:

- Barely a third of the universities require the intern to lead activities that create a mission to improve student achievement
- Fewer than one-fourth require aspiring principals to lead activities that implement good instructional practices
- Only 15 percent require interns to lead the work of literacy and numeracy task forces to improve student performance in these critical areas
- Only a third of the universities require the intern to lead activities such as creating or using authentic assessments
- Fewer than half require interns to lead activities in which faculties analyze school wide data and examine the performance of subgroups
- About half of the universities require the intern to lead activities that support change through quality sustained professional development

- About one-fourth require interns to lead activities for organizing and using time and acquiring and using resources to meet the goals of school improvement (Fry, et al., 2005, p. 5)

With this information, the authors opined that interns are more likely to follow than lead, are under-supported during their experiences, and their performance evaluations lack a high degree of rigor. Also, they stated the university department heads are “overconfident about the effectiveness of their principal preparation program and the quality of the internships they offer aspiring principals” (Fry, et al., 2005, p. 6). The researchers stated the preparation program was not a high priority and was out of sync with accountability demands. Finally, they discussed that leadership departments and school districts do not work hand in hand to provide structured internships for the aspiring principals. The study makes many suggestions to state policy-makers, universities, school districts, and professional organizations for improvement of internships (Fry, et al., 2005).

### **Poverty and Minorities**

The shifting in U.S. demographics are affecting where school leaders will be needed and the types of skills they should possess. The racial composition of public schools is changing rapidly, especially in certain states. Despite the changing demographics in schools, there is little empirical research on how leadership preparation should be altered to address the needs of these changes. Riehl (2000) argues that school leaders must be prepared to foster “new meanings about diversity,” promote “inclusive school cultures and instructional programs,” and build

“relationships between schools and communities” (p. 55). It is critical that school leaders ensure the value of multicultural and multiethnic information in curriculum and staff development (Hoyle, English, & Steffy, 2005). “School leaders must remember that their interpersonal communication sends out clear signals about how much they trust and believe in others, and can create the kind of teamwork that accomplishes miracles” (Hoyle, et al., 2005, p. 15). Building relationships, developing policies, and problem solving require skills of the role of the leader as principals continue to work with complex cultural, political, social, economic, and legal frameworks (Hoyle, et al., 2005). Hoyle, English, and Steffy (2005) add, “Schools must move beyond seeing cultural diversity as something to be tolerated to seeing it as an opportunity to move forward through functional conflict” (p. 30). Additionally, they point out the importance of taking the initiative to promote a dialogue with diverse groups: “School leaders must shed any naïve notions about the melting pot analogy used so often to disguise the submergence and submission of ethnicity and cultural identity, which has brought about great resentment and conflict in the schools. Their goal should be to prepare students to be cross-culturally competent so that all students can reach their potential in a diverse society and world” (Solomon & Ogbu, 1992; Banks, 1988; Hoyle, et al., 2005, p. 47).

Regardless of the location of the school, economic background, or ethnic background, every aspiring and seated administrator has a plethora of educational issues to handle on a daily basis. Larry Lashway (2003) stated, “The 1980s, “instructional leadership” became the dominant paradigm for school leaders after

researchers noticed that effective schools usually had principals who kept a high focus on curriculum and instruction. In the first half of the 1990s, attention to instructional leadership seemed to waver, displaced by discussions of school management and leadership facilitator. However, recently the statement was shot back to the top of the leadership agenda, driven by continued growth of accountability systems based on standards” (par. 11). Additionally, he states that instructional leadership is a critical skill in which few principals have had in-depth training (Lashway, 2003).

Challenges for urban schools are more profound: “While educators and the public are concerned about general outcomes of schooling, of particular worry are the historic, persistent, and pervasive differences between groups of students by race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, and special educational needs. Widely cited as ‘the achievement gap,’ these disparities in the experiences of students in schools and the measure of what they have learned are both familiar and deeply troubling” (Portin, et al., 2009, p. 4). Principals are continually challenged to motivate the unmotivated to be successful, which can include the principal. Dealing with drop outs, failure rates, and high-stakes testing along with disgruntled employees and parents can take a toll on the leader. Moreover, a safe school environment is the key to making the students and the staff feel at ease. State and federal mandates and accountability standards can easily bring the leader into a depressed state. Additionally, the budgetary restraints can really bind the hands of the principal. Furthermore, hiring highly-qualified teachers and keeping them is always hit or miss, particularly in schools with high poverty and/or minority student populations. Milli

Pierce (2003) stated, “Some of the most dramatic changes in the context of schooling are demographic” (Pierce & Stapelton, 2003, p. 1). Additionally, Pierce declares that public schools must adapt to the changes in the communities or they will be replaced by “charter schools, parochial schools, and private academies” (2003, p. 3). The National Center for Education Statistics released new data in July 2010 that discusses the status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups. The report examines the progress and educational challenges of students in the United States by race and ethnicity. Some of the data in the report include:

- Between 1980 and 2008, the racial/ethnic composition of the United States changed - the white population declined from 80% of the total population to 66%, the Hispanic population increased from 6% to 15% of the total, the Black population remained at about 12%, and the Asian/Pacific Islander population increased from less than 2% of the total population to 4%
- The percentage of children living in poverty was higher for blacks (34%), American Indians/Alaska Natives (33%), Hispanics (27%), and Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islander (26%) than that for children of two or more races (18%), Asians (11%), and whites (10%)
- In 2007, a higher percentage of Black elementary students had been retained in a grade (21%) than was the case for White, Hispanic, or Asian students
- A higher percentage of Black 6th through 12th grade students had been suspended (43%) from school at some point than was the case for students of any other race/ ethnicity

- In 2007 the status dropout rate was higher among Hispanics (21%) than Blacks (8%), Asia/Pacific Islander (6%), and white (5%) (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010, p. iii-vii)

With the trends and data presented in this report, the challenges are clearly going to grow exponentially for leaders of the public school sector. Reform of the preparation and internships is needed to meet the needs of the twenty-first century challenges.

The literature concerning principal preparation programs, the internship component, and the development of principals ready to lead schools with high poverty and/or minority student populations is not profound. There are many studies on low-performing schools with high poverty and/or minority student populations that turned around their schools' performance to be successful, but these studies do not include information about the principal's training. Thomas Kersten, Daniel White, and Margaret Trybus (2010) stated, "Those questioning the efficacy of leadership preparation programs are expecting educational administration professors to ensure that their graduates, many of whom are entering administration with minimal years of teaching experience, are well prepared to assume sophisticated leadership positions" (p. 1). They add, "The need to align educational administration course curriculum and program requirements with principal responsibilities must focus on not only traditional coursework but also the administrative internship, often the culminating experience prior to obtaining a principalship" (Kersten, et al., 2010, p. 2). The principal should be able to multi-task and prioritize, but this is not always the case.

The literature the researcher read was very clear on components of the preparation programs and the internships that need clarification and reform. Regardless, there are no systemic empirical studies linking the skills needed as a principal to better serve racially and ethnically diverse learners with the aspiring principal's internship.

### **Summary**

To conclude, when reading all literature and looking at the twenty-first century leaders of schools, one thing remains constant: a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students. In order to do this, many recommendations are listed in the literature, including continuing to be a life-long learner and dwelling in professional development opportunities, to improve their instructional leader abilities: "To achieve the goal of having principals who are ready to lead in all schools, especially those who need them most, everyone concerned – states, districts, universities – will have to make new and often-unaccustomed connections. The right kind of training for this new leadership paradigm means that the content of training in universities, academies, or other providers needs to be more solidly connected to leadership standards that put learning first and foremost" (Mitgang, 2008, p. 5). Additionally, Mitgang (2008) stated, "Nearly seven of 10 principals surveyed by Public Agenda believe that the leadership training at universities is 'out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today's school districts'" (p. 6).

Leadership training should not cease after a principal has been hired. If an experienced principal is hired from out of the district, his expertise may be different from what the district expects him/her to have. Experience is in the eye of the beholder, and schools and districts vary on situational experience. A continued mentoring program is essential in the development of educational leaders. Resources should be set aside to enhance the professional development opportunities for these leaders of the future. Just as Eliza Doolittle needed some “polishing” in *My Fair Lady*, so do educational leaders if they are to keep up with the continuing demands of educating the youth for tomorrow. Just as computer programs and applications need an upgrade to keep up with the technological times, so do educational leaders. A quick mini-lesson or workshop on new educational mandates and best-practices will keep new and veteran leaders up to speed in the ever-changing society and societal demands.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The overall focus of this study was to develop a greater understanding of the experiences and perceptions of administrators' principal internships to see if they prepared them to lead schools with high minority and poverty student populations. This chapter highlights the research methodology and procedures used in this study. It will contain the following sections: rationale for a qualitative study, research design, research questions, participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness. The purpose of this study is to investigate practicing middle school administrators' experiences during their principal internships and their perspectives on how well the internship prepared them to be leaders of schools with high minority and/or high poverty student populations. This chapter discusses the qualitative research methodology and procedures that were used in this study.

#### **Rationale for a Qualitative Study**

Regardless of the type of research design, research studies all begin with a question for which researchers want the answer. Slavin (2007) states, "Most research as being subsumed under two large categories: quantitative and qualitative" (p. 7). He adds that quantitative research poses hypotheses that are supported or disconfirmed

by data. He describes qualitative research as, “Seeks to describe a given setting in its full richness or complexity or to explore reasons that a situation exists” (Slavin, 2007, p. 8). The majority of the methodological approaches in this field of study lend themselves to qualitative measures. The research will be holistic and interpretive through the lens of the researcher, and collecting, analyzing, coding, and writing up the data will be intertwined and cyclical in nature. Surveys and interviews are most prevalent in the study. As mentioned in the review of literature, individual participants and cohorts, in addition to entire programs, were studied and have been the major keys to reforming the administrator preparation programs for twenty-first century schools.

A quantitative study could provide numerical data for successful schools and districts in regards to low socioeconomic and minority populations. The researcher could obtain the data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website and the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports from the schools. Additionally, tables, charts, and graphs would provide supplementary information about the findings of the study. Outliers could be investigated further for clarification purposes and provide additional studies on the subject. Utilizing such a large amount of data from TEA could be cumbersome, but the statistical analysis would prove to be interesting and purposeful.

A qualitative methodological design was the best format to use on this study on principal preparation programs, the internship component, and the development of principals ready to lead schools with high poverty and/or minority student populations.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that using a qualitative research design, “Allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (p. 12). One of the most important reasons to do a qualitative research study is, “The desire to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge”(Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). This qualitative study examined the experiences of certified middle school administrators in the Central Texas area. Participants’ academic preparation for certification were examined, including some of their university coursework and field experiences.

For the purpose of this study, it was important to understand several participants’ common or shared experiences of the principal internship. Charmaz (2005) affirms, "A grounded theory approach encourages researchers to remain close to their studied worlds and to develop an integrated set of theoretical concepts from their empirical materials that not only synthesize and interpret them but also show processual relationships” (p. 508). The researcher agrees with Charmaz’s approach to stay close to the participants for this study involving the experiences of individuals during their principal internships. An inductive grounded theory design with constant comparison of data and analysis was used for this study.

Grounded theory originated in 1967 for the purpose of building theory from data and was developed by Glaser and Strauss. Since then, many other researchers have used grounded theory techniques in their research endeavors, including Charmaz,

Corbin, Clarke, Wilson, and Stern, among others,. Cathy Urquhart (2013) provides key features of grounded theory taken from Cresswell (1998) and Dey (1999):

1. The aim of grounded theory is to generate or discover a theory.
2. The researcher has to set aside theoretical ideas in order to let the substantive theory emerge.
3. Theory focuses on how individuals interact with the phenomena under study.
4. Theory asserts a plausible relationship between concepts and sets of concepts.
5. Theory is derived from data acquired from fieldwork interviews, observation and documents.
6. Data analysis is systematic and begins as soon as data is available.
7. Data analysis proceeds through identifying categories and connecting them.
8. Further data collection (or sampling) is based on emerging concepts.
9. These concepts are developed through constant comparison with additional data.
10. Data collection can stop when no new conceptualizations emerge.
11. Data analysis proceeds from open coding (identifying categories, properties and dimensions) through selective coding (clustering around categories) to theoretical coding.
12. The resulting theory can be reported in a narrative framework or a set of propositions (p. 4-5).

During the qualitative study, “Research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured” (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). The process of grounded theory encompasses

multiple steps of data collection and the fine-tuning and interrelationship of categories of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher reduces data gathered as lengthy interviews describing the shared experiences of several informants to a central meaning or essence of the experience (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). The researcher took the path of interviewing the participants and gathering rich details about their experiences as an administrator and their thoughts on the preparation program and internship that got them to that point. By using a qualitative research design, the researcher was able to use open-end questions with the participants to gather rich description of their experiences that disclosed the whole story of their internships as they relate to working in schools with high poverty and minority student populations.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research methods are used to gain interpretations regarding phenomena about which little is known, thereby, making tacit knowledge explicit (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative design selected for this investigation is grounded theory. The researcher used purposeful, theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, and open, axial, and selective coding. The researcher took the path of interviewing the participants and gathering rich details about their experiences as an administrator and their thoughts on their preparation program and internship that got them to that point. Theory was developed after closely integrating and comparing the data during the qualitative study: “Several aspects emerge during a qualitative study.”(Creswell, 2003, p. 181). The research is holistic and interpretive through the lens of the researcher and collecting, analyzing, coding, and writing up the data was

intertwined and cyclical in nature. By using a qualitative research design, the researcher was able to use open-end questions with the participants to gather rich description of their experiences that disclosed the whole story of their preparation programs and internships as they relate to high poverty and minority student populations.

A qualitative methodology gives greater insight into this study. Slavin (2007) states, “Qualitative research typically seeks to describe a given setting in its full richness and complexity or to explore reasons that a situation exists” (p. 8). The primary focus was to interview participants in the Central Texas area and question their training and internship experiences as well as their biggest challenges they see in today’s schools in regards to their leadership training and leading schools with high minority and/or high poverty student populations. Transforming the participants’ information into thick, rich descriptive detail will provide deeper meaning for the study and the reader. By analyzing the data collected from the participants, the researcher will be able to unearth common themes and explore emerging details. This qualitative design provided a very systematic approach to collecting and analyzing the data to formulate a theory.

### **Purposeful Sampling**

The researcher in qualitative research can select participants and sites for a particular study because they purposely inform an understanding of the research problem being studied (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, for this study, criterion sampling worked well because all individuals studied represented people who

experienced the same phenomenon, which, in this case, would mean the principal internship and working in middle schools with high populations of minority and poverty students in Central Texas.

### **Participants**

Amos Hatch (2007) discusses participant perspectives and states, “Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it...Qualitative studies try to capture the perspectives that actors use as a basis for their actions in specific social settings” (p. 7). This grounded theory study obtained data from four participants who were similar to the researcher because they all had internships during their principal preparation program. The participants studied were administrators that work in middle schools in the Central Texas area. The researcher acquired the names of all of the middle schools in the Region 13 area and sought out the participants, administrators, via email and/or telephone. Although the sample was random in nature, the researcher was interested in a purposeful sample that would provide the broadest range of information for the study regarding schools with large minority and economically disadvantaged populations. Creswell (2003) describes purposeful sampling as, “to select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions” (p.184).

The researcher had four participants for this study: one female principal, one male principal, and two male assistant principals agreed to participate in the study. These participants met the criteria of working as an administrator in a Central Texas

middle school that had high populations of minority and economically disadvantaged students. The participants were contacted by email and phone to set up place and time for their interview. The participants and researcher mutually agreed upon a place and time for the interview. Two of the interviews were performed at the school where the administrator currently worked. The other two were phone interviews at the participants' request. Additional information was relevant to the study pertaining to gender, age, years in the field, teaching background, etc. That information was gathered from a survey created in Survey Monkey (Appendix D). The participants were emailed a link to the survey for completion. The interviews lasted from thirty minutes to one hour. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the four participants and the schools where they worked.

### **Data Collection Method**

Creswell (2007) discusses data collection in grounded theories. He says individuals, if they are dispersed, “can provide important contextual information useful in developing categories in the axial coding phase of research. They need to be individuals who have participated in the process or action the researcher is studying” (p.122). Data collection for this study was derived primarily from interviews. Corbin and Strauss (2008) discuss Mishler’s (1986) views on interviews: “He goes on to explain how the interview is shaped both in its construction and meaning through the questions that are asked, the pauses, facial expressions, and other verbal and nonverbal communications that occur between the respective parties” (p. 28). Creswell (2003) describes advantages of collecting interview data as useful when participants cannot

be observed directly, and it allows the researcher some control of the line of questioning. On the other hand, he also states that some limitations of using interviewing as a type of data collection are that the researcher's presence may bring about bias responses, it provides filtered information through the eyes of the interviewees, and participants may not articulate their answers as others do (Creswell, 2003). Before any of the interviews were conducted, the participants were given the consent form (Appendix B), which outlined their rights as a human subject. The consent form outlined the basic procedures for the study. Consent was asked of the participants to collect the data and personal information. Additionally, all information is confidential and pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. The transcription of the interviews was sent to the participants for verification of information. The participants were told they could have a copy of the audio if they would like to have one. None of the participants asked for an audio copy of their interview. Data collection of the interviews was taken after the typical work day so that it did not interrupt their daily routines during the school day.

Data gathering methods for this study include non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and email and telephone interviews. A digital recorder was used, and data was transferred to the computer for transcription. The researcher transcribed one interview and had the other three participant's information transcribed by a second party. Surveying and interviewing the participants was the best way to acquire the answers to the research questions. Additional interviews were not needed

for clarification of data. The use of frequency counts will help to determine emergent themes.

### **Data Analysis**

Hatch (2002) states, “Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories” (p. 148). Data analysis will involve coding, or chunking: “Grounded theory provides a procedure for developing categories of information (open coding), interconnecting the categories (axial coding), building a ‘story’ that connects the categories (selective coding), and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2007, p. 160). In the open coding phase, the researcher examined the transcripts for categories of information (or nodes as used in NVivo) looking for repeating ideas. The researcher immersed herself in the text/transcript to the point of almost memorization. The researcher used a constant comparative method to saturate the categories. Creswell (2007) describes constant comparative method as, “Taking the information from data collections and comparing it to emerging categories” (p.64). Axial coding took place after the initial categories were developed. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe axial coding as a process of connecting the categories of information into one central phenomenon category. Selective coding took place after the researcher found the central phenomenon and related the data to the other categories, developing a story. Once coding was complete, the researcher prepared reports by summarizing the prevalence of codes, focusing on the similarities

and differences in related codes across original contexts, and comparing the relationships between the codes. The researcher purchased QSR NVivo software to help perform rapid analysis and summarize findings quickly. This software provided security by storing the database and files of the interviews. It enabled the researcher to manipulate the data.

### **Trustworthiness**

Confirming the accuracy of the data and findings is critical in the study. For this study on principal internships, the researcher used thick, rich descriptions, triangulation, member checking, clarification of researcher bias, and peer review and debriefing for verifying the accuracy of the study. The researcher provided details of the study for the reader for credibility. The researcher used triangulation of the different data sources of information. Joseph Maxwell (2005) states, “This strategy reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops” (p. 112). Using rich, thick description to convey findings, along with member-checking, permitted the researcher to determine the accuracies of the qualitative findings and maintain credibility. The researcher listened carefully to the participants and had the participants review their transcripts to ensure accuracy of the data. During the interviews, the researcher asked for clarification and elaborations to reinforce the data in the interviews. Transcriptions of the interviews were emailed to the participants for approval or for corrections of their information. The researcher would like to clarify the biases she has, allowing her self-reflection to resonate with

the readers. Additionally, the researcher used a peer-debriefer to review the study and ask questions that readers may have. To ensure transferability, the researcher provided a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were vital to the research. Additionally, an audit trail was established to guarantee confirmability of the data collection and to also document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the qualitative methods used to answer the research questions:

1. What were middle school administrators' internship experiences related to working with high minority and/or high poverty populations?
2. What factors of the middle school principals' internship were instrumental to the success of the middle school administrators' working with high minority and/or high poverty populations?
3. What theory emerges that explains the value of principals' internship experiences to work successfully with high minority and/or high poverty student populations?

Grounded theory was chosen as the qualitative method used to develop theory for this procedure. Data collection was in the form of interviews and surveys of the participants. Constant comparative method was used with open, axial, and selective coding for analysis of the data. Issues of trustworthiness were discussed as well as

limitations of the study. Chapter 4 will discuss the findings of the study from the data collected and analyzed.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to investigate practicing middle school administrators' experiences and perceptions of their principal internship and determine if it prepared them for leading schools with high populations of minorities and economically disadvantaged students. In this chapter, findings generated from the data collected from open-ended, semi-structured interviews with four participants are presented. During the interviews, the participants shared their experiences and perspectives on their educational background, professional role and responsibility, their preparation program and internship for school leadership, challenges they face in school, and recommendations for preparing future leaders. The research questions guiding the interviews were:

1. What were middle school administrators' internship experiences related to working with high minority and/or high poverty populations?
2. What factors of the middle school principals' internship were instrumental to the success of the middle school administrators working with high minority and/or high poverty populations?
3. What theory emerges that explains the value of principals' internship experiences to work successfully with high minority and/or high poverty student populations?

The audiotape of each participant's interview was transcribed, imported into NVivo, and then coded to identify emerging themes. Additional information was gathered through a ten-question survey linked to Survey Monkey. This data was predominantly about their background in education.

Because the researcher chose a grounded theory method for the study, analysis had a systematic approach. Categories of information were generated in the open-coding stage then the categories were "selected and positioned within a theoretical model (axial coding)" and then the story is explained from the connectedness of the categories (selective coding) using a constant comparative model (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 98). The data was uploaded into the computer software program, NVivo, and managed by the researcher. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) suggest using data summary tables, but the researcher utilized NVivo to manipulate and move codes as well as annotate and/or write memos about the codes. While the software could not interpret the emotional connotation of the participants' responses, it did serve a great purpose of housing the data and assisting the researcher with assembling and locating information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008)

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section will introduce the reader to the participants with description of their backgrounds and career path. The next section will describe their perspectives of their preparation program, including the internship and how they relate to the research questions. The last section will reveal the commonalities that emerged during the data analysis.

Interviews from the four middle school administrators were the main data analyzed. The researcher sent the predefined questions to the participants prior to the interview to allow the participants time to think about the questions in advance. The questions are mostly open-ended and allowed as much leeway and freedom as possible for the interviewees to respond. The questions for the interview were obviously drafted prior to conducting the interviews and they were constructed around the three research questions.

The participants were chosen through a purposive sampling to include administrators currently serving in middle schools that have high populations of minorities and economically disadvantaged students. The participants also met the criteria of being in the Central Texas area, specifically in the Region 13 Educational Service Center area.

## **Participants**

### **Quinn.**

The researcher interviewed Quinn at his school office. Quinn has been in education for nineteen years. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies with an emphasis in literary studies as well as a Master's of Education in Educational Administration. His certifications include Principal (grades EC-12), Elementary English (grades 1-8), and Elementary Self-Contained (grades 1-8). He has taught six years in grades four through six in private school in all subject areas, including English as a second language (ESL). After that, Quinn taught first and fifth grades in public school, including gifted and talented education, and he was a reading/

literacy instructional coach. He has been an administrator for thirteen years; seven of those years were elementary (grades PK-2), and the rest were at middle school (grades 6-8). Prior to becoming a principal, he served three years as an assistant principal.

Currently, Quinn is the principal at a middle school northeast of Austin, Texas. This is his second full year as principal of this middle school. He was asked to be a change agent for this school; the previous principal was asked to leave mid-year, and Quinn came in to help re-focus the vision and mindsets of the staff, students, and parents. His campus was rated academically acceptable through the state accountability system. The middle school has a total of 810 students with 59% of them being economically disadvantaged and 56.1% minority students. Additionally, 41.5% of the student population is at-risk. The largest ethnic distribution for his campus is Hispanic.

When asked about his role and responsibilities, Quinn replied that his “responsibility is facilitating a transformation on campus and ensuring that our transformation was positive and that our focus return back to what is best for children, not convenient for adults.” He referred to his first two months on campus as “triage.”

He explains the number one time consumer, and most importantly for him, is building relationships with all of the stake holders, which includes staff, teachers, parents, and the community but, most importantly, the students that he serves. Second to that, he states that it takes a great deal of time learning and knowing the curriculum and being an instructional coach to ensure best instructional practices are taking place for the students. The third item that takes up time is the basic operations of the

building. This would include keeping the campus within the legal parameters and the basic “minutia of managing a school.”

**Nan.**

The researcher interviewed Nan at her school office at the end of the school day. Nan has been in education for seventeen years. She holds two degrees: one is a Bachelor of Arts in English and the other is a master’s degree in Educational Leadership. She is currently taking classes to achieve a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration. Her certifications include Principal (grades EC-12) and Secondary English (grades 6-12). She taught four and a half years as a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade language arts teacher before moving into the assistant principal role for five and a half years at the same middle school (grades 6-8). She has been a principal for seven years.

Nan serves as the principal of a middle school that is located northeast of Austin. Her school is located just southeast of Quinn’s middle school but in a different district. Her middle school campus serves 786 students of which 68% are economically disadvantaged. Her campus has 70.6% minorities with 55% of them Hispanic. Her at-risk population is 42.8%. The school was rated academically acceptable for the state’s accountability system.

Nan sees her role and responsibilities as the leader on campus to be the instructional leader. Additionally, she is the budget and facilities manager as well as the professional developer. The majority of her time is spent around the “systems and

design of how we support instruction and how we deliver instruction.” She adds that data disaggregation and responding to data encompasses a lot of time as well. Last, she stated that much of her time is spent reporting to the central office, particularly since her campus is a Title 1 school. She has a strong administrative team that really helps with the managing of the school.

**Clay.**

The researcher interviewed Clay over the phone while he was in his hotel room out of town on business. Clay set the time with the researcher. He was in Chicago at a school conference and chose to interview after his last session of the day. Clay has been in education for eleven years. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business and Kinesiology as well as a master’s degree in Educational Leadership. His professional certifications include Classroom Teacher/Special Education (grades EC-12) and Principal (grades EC-12). He has five years of teaching experience with science and as the behavioral teacher in special education. Additionally, he became the coordinator for the behavior unit and maintained that supervisory role for five years.

Clay is currently the assistant principal for Nan. This is his first year as an administrator. He stated that his main role and responsibilities include supervising departments, helping on the leadership teams, assisting the teachers in the classroom, and “help them understand culture can change and understand the process and procedures.” He mentioned he is in charge of safety on campus and hit on the importance of interventions and improving every day. The majority of his time is

consumed with investigating concerns on the campus, discipline, and “helping the teachers just improve.”

**Tritt.**

The researcher interviewed Tritt over the phone while he was in his school office. Tritt had many after school activities and requested a phone interview. Announcements over the public address system as well as his walkie-talkie conversations could be heard throughout the interview. Tritt has been an educator for 12 years. His degrees include a Bachelor of Science in Speech, a Master of Art degree in Communication Studies, and a Master of Education in Educational Administration. He is currently enrolled and taking classes for a doctoral degree for school improvement. He is certified in the following: Physical Education (grades EC-12), Secondary Speech Communications (grades 6-12), and Technology Applications (grades 8-12). With that many certifications, he has taught many classes including, communication applications in high school, 8<sup>th</sup> grade speech, 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> PALS, 8<sup>th</sup> grade career exploration, 6<sup>th</sup> grade career investigation, 7<sup>th</sup>/ 8<sup>th</sup> grade study skills, 6<sup>th</sup> grade teen leadership, 7<sup>th</sup>/ 8<sup>th</sup> grade athletics, 7<sup>th</sup>/ 8<sup>th</sup> grade video production, and 7<sup>th</sup>/ 8<sup>th</sup> grade broadcast journalism. He has been a middle school assistant principal for six years.

Tritt’s current position is a middle school assistant principal, and this is his second year at this school. His school is located in the same district as Nan and Clay but is situated northeast from their school. The student enrollment is currently 866,

and the school performed academically acceptable under the state of Texas' accountability system. Tritt's school has 62.7% of its total population identified as economically disadvantaged. The school has a minority population of 67.3% with Hispanics holding 48.1% of that total. The at-risk student population is 33.1%. As an assistant principal at his school his role is "obviously discipline," bus duty, safety drills, textbooks, and academic instruction, which includes professional development as well as professional appraisals. He stated that discipline, ARD meetings, and parent meetings take up the majority of his time.

Data in Table 4.1 depicts the information the participants provided for the online survey from SurveyMonkey.com. The participants were emailed a link that would send them directly the survey. The survey questions are listed in Appendix D.

Table 4.1 Participant Background Information

	<b>Quinn</b>	<b>Nan</b>	<b>Clay</b>	<b>Tritt</b>
<b>Degrees Held</b>	B.S. Interdisciplinary Studies M.Ed. Educational Administration	B.A. English M.Ed. Administration	B.S. Business & Kinesiology M.Ed. Educational Leadership	B.S. Speech M.A. Communication Studies M.Ed. Educational Administration
<b>Certifications</b>	Principal EC-12 English 1-8 Elementary self-contained 1-8	Principal EC-12 Secondary English 6-12	Principal EC-12 Classroom teacher/special education EC-12	Principal EC-12 Physical Education EC-12 Secondary Speech Communications 6-12 Technology Applications 8-12
<b>Years in Education</b>	19	17	11	12
<b>Current Position</b>	Principal	Principal	Assistant Principal	Assistant Principal
<b>Years as a Teacher</b>	6	4.5	5	6
<b>Content Taught</b>	4-6 all subjects 1 <sup>st</sup> grade 5 <sup>th</sup> grade GT Reading/ Literacy Instructional Coach	7 <sup>th</sup> /8 <sup>th</sup> Language Arts	MS Science Special Education/ Behavior Unit	HS Communication applications 8th Speech 7th/8th PALS 8th career exploration 6th career investigation 7th/ 8th study skills 6th teen leadership 7th/ 8th athletics 7th/ 8th video production 7th/ 8th broadcast journalism
<b>Years as Administrator</b>	13	12.5	1	6
<b>Years as Assistant Principal</b>	4	5.5	1	6
<b>How long was internship?</b>	1 year	1 semester	1 year	1 year
<b>What year was internship?</b>	2000-2001	2001	2009-2010	2006-07

## **Preparation Program and Internship**

Each participant had a unique preparation program and internship specifically designed for their needs and experience on the job. The following is a discussion of the findings with details about the participants' principal preparation program as well as internship and their experiences. Each participant had a different experience and the researcher will allow them to speak for themselves with direct quotations from the transcripts of their interviews. By presenting the information in this way, the reader will be able to understand the authenticity of their perspectives along with the richness of the subject matter.

The first research question asked, "What were middle school administrators' internship experiences related to working with high minority and/or high poverty populations?" Each participant had a different perspective of their preparation program and the internship attached to it:

### **Quinn.**

Quinn's principal preparation program was an administrative cohort through the regional service center. It was not a typical program with meetings at a designated time each week. He stated that it was "distance learning but none of them [classes] were technically online." He was assigned projects and would meet back at the service center with the teacher to turn them in. The class was "a lot of activity-based practicum versus just lecture and stand and deliver." The researcher questioned whether or not his preparatory classes had a course specific to dealing with minority and poverty groups of students. This is his reply:

I don't know necessarily if we had a direct course, but we had a course specifically designed to look at serving the needs of current populations at school, and so looking and evaluating multiculturalism, how to serve the needy student, looking at identifying students in need and understanding that student in need doesn't necessarily just attach to poverty. The cohort I was in was very much similar to me, for the most part, and we wound up going way beyond our class times and wound up expanding upon, and creating projects and things that maybe the other classes might not have, but a lot of the information, especially in that class, really helped me understand the dynamics of positive behavior supports, especially when you are serving students that are in a needy situation – looking at the socioeconomically disadvantaged students, specifically, a lot of what I have discovered is that there's not a lot of praise or affirmation in their home life, so therefore, if the school system is spending a lot of time providing that, so I think that's one reason why my action research to graduate was successful because it focused on a real, unexplored water at that point, which was positive behavior supports.

For clarification purposes, the researcher questioned if he learned most about working with those populations on the job or in class, and he replied,

Well, I don't know necessarily that I had a professor that talked straight to it. I think based upon my own personal interests, I explored it a lot more as I was in the courses that I was in so that I made my attachments to the students I was serving. So, yes and no. I think, given the autonomy by the professor to explore what we wanted to, gave me the ability to explore what my interests were, which was serving the students who was not traditionally identified as at-risk.

Quinn did his internship at the middle school where he worked as an instructional coach and as the district was transitioning the sitting assistant principal to be the principal of the new middle school located northeast of the school where they worked. Quinn eventually took over as the interim assistant principal while he interned. He already had a background of knowledge of working with minorities and economically disadvantaged students because the schools where he worked had the same populations. Additionally, he was raised, and had his own personal experiences, as a minority and economically disadvantaged during his schooling.

When discussing his experiences with minorities and economically disadvantaged student populations during his internship, he said that those populations are what attracted him to his position: “I specifically like serving students who typically were sold short before they were given a chance. I am a firm believer in students will rise or fall to the expectations you set or the converse of that is the silent bigotry of low expectations, and it is important to me that in any role that I serve I have the ability to work with students in the capacity to help them gain that agency.” When he first began his internship, his principal/supervisor had the same mentality as he had about disadvantaged student populations. He speaks of his principal and internship,

That he was going to push every single student as hard as he could and that he was not going to allow for excuses, and even to the time that people would criticize him because he was harder sometimes on the minorities, but it is because he wanted an advantage, that they had an advantage in their life, and I respected that about him. Some of his approaches I didn't always agree with, but his respect of empowering and believing that all children have the ability to succeed, that's what I appreciate. So, during my internship, I think watching the principal interact with children, watching the principal call parents out that weren't holding their children accountable, I think that him giving me the autonomy I needed allowed me to try out certain things which had monumental positive effects on campus, allowed me to find different ways to motivate different groups of students, specifically looking at the students who were often times not noticed, and I'm not talking about the bad behavior kids, or the kids that got in trouble all the time, I'm talking about the bubble kids, and not even mean academically bubble, those who that they don't get attention for the positive, they'll get attention any way they can. And that's where I found a lot of where I was very successful building those relationships and it just reiterated to me that it doesn't matter who the kiddo is, people thrive in structure, people thrive in a relationship, and people thrive in an environment that they know it's safe, and that whatever we are doing, it is about them being successful.

Quinn discussed his internship and the importance of the process:

I think working in the internship, wherever your internship is, you have to work with a leader who's going to model facilitating of learning and not controlling learning. And I think I didn't have that experience. I learned a lot of it, I knew my own philosophies, but people behaved very well for the principal I worked with because they were scared of the consequences as opposed to being motivated to do. That is why I have to be as honest as possible.

Quinn believes another important factor is to teach prospective principal applicants global awareness of poverty and attach it to something like the Ruby Payne series. Teaching the dynamics and vernacular, or the exposure and background knowledge, would really help as a teacher and administrator. He does believe that he had an average internship experience only because he already had background knowledge and experiences with minority and economically disadvantaged student populations. He "didn't get a lot of guidance...it was more like trial by fire, but I learned a lot just by, I think I am pretty intuitive."

**Nan.**

Nan had a traditional approach to her principal preparation program but a non-traditional approach to her internship. Her preparatory classes were face-to-face with the professors. She felt like a lot of the classes were more theory-based and not practical for practitioners in the field, with the exception of the law class, which she felt was "very relevant." She drove twice a week to classes during the school year and more frequently during the summer. In respect to her professors in the classroom Nan stated, "I felt like I had, like I was going to classrooms with a lot of individuals that were the world of academia and had not been practitioners. I clearly remember my

action research class being facilitated by an adjunct professor that was a superintendent. So that felt a little more practical. He'd bring some relevance."

When asked if she had a course during her preparation that specifically discussed minorities and economically disadvantaged students, she responded,

No. I-I think we really talked about more about special education students, gifted and talented students. I don't know that our program really addressed, you know, I know that a lot of my interns, now as a principal, have had lots of classes on social justice. They have had lots of classes on cultural relevance. And I think that's what's real traditional now, that it's kind of become the norm. But I didn't take a culturally responsive class. I had a course that dealt with special pops, but that was the kind of almost the same course that I took when I was in pre-service. So, we didn't have a course specifically dealing with minority groups in low socioeconomic.

For Nan's principal internship, she actually became an assistant principal mid-year and "had a semester under my belt before I stepped into my internship." Her supervisor during her internship was the principal, but she also worked closely with the associate principal. She had "free-range" when it came to making decisions during her internship. She was a teacher leader most of her teaching career. Because of that, during the beginning of her master's program, the principal gave her many opportunities to sub as the assistant principal prior to interning: "I felt like I had some...I was ahead of the game in trying to figure out administration as a classroom teacher and then in my internship it was just, I had freedom." She describes her internship experiences,

During—it was during my internship that I had the opportunity to work on this campus and where I really got to experience large pockets of low socioeconomic students, 33%. There was a visible population of minority students, predominately Hispanic students. We really did not start—I did not start serving English Language Learners though until probably 10 years ago because our district had two of the satellite campuses, so everybody on the east

side of the district went to this campus, and everybody on the other side of the district, went to that campus.

A population that we did serve was that this is a campus that serves Texas Baptist Children's Home. And so to give you a little bit of background knowledge on Texas Baptist Children's Home, it is, it is a community where they have house parents. Many of the children are awards of the court, so they've been there. They've-they go through until they're 18 years old. They've-they've kind of gone through foster care or parents have lost their parental rights every now and then. Some of them get to go back, but that's rare. Most of the students that are at Texas Baptist Children's Home start with me in 6th grade, they leave with me in 8th grade and go on to-to their high school. And so, that was my first experience really with-with serving students that had a great deal of challenges that they had in their personal lives, that they had to overcome.

When asked if Nan thought her internship prepared her for the principalship with these populations she replied, "I don't know that it really allowed me to prep—to be prepared for what I would be facing." She added,

But I think it really has to be more on a level of a-a clear understanding of social justice. And really understanding—almost going back and understanding the history of education and where the inequities have been. I think when you get that, a clearer picture of what has happened, and that we're not pointing fingers or-or blame. But to better understand just how the school system has been designed, that that would start to open eyes for some principals, so that it's not—so it's not so overwhelming. And there's a, you know, we all talk about being research based, and it's-it's almost become too easy to be research based. You want to really be research validated and have some data behind it.

You know, we've done in my experiences, we've done a lot of work with, you know, brain research and serving children of poverty. And-and so how you merge all of those pieces together. So, one, I think you have to know the history of school and what has happened. Two, you have to understand the different cultures and there a number of differences that everyone comes with a different culture. Even if you have a community of Hispanic children you-you cannot clump your English Language Learners with Hispanic students that have been in this country from birth. And you can't clump them together with the-with-with the Hispanic children that-that come from a that-that have Spanish as their first language. Children were born into that circumstance. They-there was no control there, so-so how do we tool kids so that they really

have that life chance tomorrow? And so, you know, I think as we consider that principalship, it is so much bigger than, you know, I think that when I came in as a Principal, my biggest worry was the budget.

She describes, at one point, hiring new teachers. As a teacher leader she would tell her supervisor, “Just give me somebody that loves kids, I can help them with the rest.” As an instructional leader of a campus of students that struggle, she does not think that way. She needs a teacher that knows the content, “And-and I figured that out at the cost of a child’s education. Because we all know, one year with a teacher that’s not-that’s not sound, that’s not strong, what happens to that kiddo for the next two years to try to recover?” “And so, no one told me those things, I had to figure them out on my own.”

She clearly had good experiences with her internship, but Nan does state it may not be the internship that got her to where she is today.

**Clay.**

Clay’s principal preparation program was traditional in nature with face to face instruction with his professors. His internship was a bit different. While teaching as a special education teacher for the emotional behavior students, he was called to take over as the director of the entire behavior unit. He interned for the principalship at the same time as running the behavior program. His supervisor during his internship was the special education director, so he did not have a typical supervisor such as a principal or assistant principal in the field.

When the researcher asked Clay to elaborate on the classes he had and if they exposed him to minority and poverty student populations and background knowledge,

he said they did: “Um, especially early on, in the course where it was, the strong emphasis on understanding poverty in schools, and understanding just the differences that come along with, you know, lower social economic backgrounds.” The course was also “really good at looking at the stereotype, understanding the dynamics of hierarchy of needs like food as well as looking at social justice.” The program also sent him to conferences that addressed schools “stricken with poverty” and strategies to work with them.

Clay stated that he did not have a whole lot of supervision during his internship. Keep in mind that he was now the director of the behavior unit, and his supervisor was the director of special education. He stated, “My boss was the head of special education, and she was very busy. She's a wonderful lady, but I just didn't have anyone directly above me...uh, that I could talk to right away. You know, to go for answers...um, and so, I had to use my resources, like I - - I had a few Principals I would call.” He claims he had a great deal of leeway when making decisions and said he “learned on the job.” He did say that he is not the kind of person that asked a lot of questions: “I just kind of grab things and do what I think is right. And uh, you know, it was, I learned a lot of good lessons doing that!” A valuable resource he continued to lean on for answers and suggestions was the secretary: “I had a really good secretary that had been there for almost eighteen years.” The secretary was “supportive and helpful” and she “understood the systems.” He did mention, “I probably could have asked more questions along the way and asked her for more help, as well. So, but it's just different when you don't have somebody there.” Being the

director of the special education behavior unit, Clay did not have a large population of students to work with. He had a total of 15 students with diverse backgrounds as well as high to low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Did his preparation and internship prepare him for these populations? Clay was on the fence with his response: “I don't know if there's any course work that can fully prepare you for all the stages that you need experience. It's just not realistic, you know.” He specifically spoke about relationships,

I would say it did prepare me in some ways. But, as far as philosophy, theory, being able to kind of look at things objectively, and, I just think there's so much—there's so much based around relationships. That you have to know, and be able to, you know, work with teachers, and—and just communicate effectively, that it's really interesting, there's really not a lot on that in the schools. And I think teachers need to help with it. I think principals need help with it, on how to communicate effectively.

He said he felt like the information prepared him but the experiences did not. “I got information that systems are important. But, there wasn't anything real tangible, for like, you know, real life examples of what kind of systems you need.” He understands the theory with minority and poverty populations, but relationships and communicating were areas of need for him.

**Tritt.**

Tritt also had a typical principal preparation program with face to face interactions with peers and professors. When asked about the type of courses he took and if they were specific to dealing with minority and economically disadvantaged student populations, he claimed that he did not have a specific class for that. He added, “But we went to a conference that we were encouraged to go to, that was on

low socio economically disadvantage students.” The researcher continued to ask for clarification on his course work, whether he had a multi-cultural class, and he responded, “The term cultural responsiveness was used a lot, and we kind of . . . my teachers seem to . . . do a lot in the in terms of the social justice. They incorporated a lot of that into my classes, like specifically our action research class. And so, our lens for action research had to kind of look through that social justice lens.” He described his action research as focusing on retention and that it looked mainly at the sub-populations of minorities and economically disadvantaged students because they “were the ones that were more apt to being retained.”

Tritt’s principal internship was a year-long in length beginning in the fall and finishing at the end of the school year. He interned at a middle school working with grades six through eight where he filled out a log of activities and had his supervisor, the principal, sign off on the log. He was teaching and coaching while he completed his internship. The building principal would periodically hire a substitute teacher to take Tritt’s classes to allow him to work in the office for experience. Tritt did not feel he had much leeway when doing his internship. He did work referrals and sat in 504 and ARD meetings, as well as worked with assessment, but he only felt he had free range of leadership opportunities when he started a new program for students at risk of retention: “I felt like I was informed, but I don’t really consider it a true internship.”

When discussing the opportunities to work with minorities and economically disadvantaged students during his internship he stated, “Well, my campus was about ahh, eighty percent minority and sixty five percent low socioeconomic, so, hum, just

by nature of working there, I worked with those populations.” The researcher asked Tritt if already having the relationship with the students was a contributing factor to his success in the internship and he replied, “Yes.” He claimed that the communication between the students and the parents was instrumental in success:

I would say one thing that helps was making the phone calls. Like when I had discipline issues, and being able to talk with those parents, and I was, I wouldn't say I am fluent in Spanish, but I was proficient. So, I was able to communicate with the parents, and that's where I found that, you know, we had a lot of communication that never took place, and they're like, "Why am I just now hearing about this?"

Tritt mentioned that a piece he felt would have meaning in the internship would be a better understanding of instructional best practices and strategies to assist these populations we discussed. He also wanted more experience with English Language Learners (ELL) and the LPAC (Language Proficiency Assessment Committee).

Tritt explained to the researcher how the internship prepared him for twenty-first century issues and change that has been occurring with the growing numbers of minority and poverty student populations. He claimed his action research assisted him but added, “I think it more had to do with the school that I was in, though. If I had been in a majority white school that had a very low, I mean a very low percentage of those populations, I don't think I would have been prepared for those populations.” To expand on the topic more, to be prepared to lead schools with these populations, he said, “I think you have to have experience. I don't think you can be a principal at a school that doesn't have that population and then move over and expect the same

results.” The biggest contributing factor for Tritt to working with these populations was,

Relationship building, I think it goes beyond that, I think it’s just the understanding . . . I think that’s part of the relationships, but hearing kid’s stories, knowing where kids are coming from, knowing their background, you know, if you want to bring over a lot of stuff with technology that you want kids to be exposed to outside of school, well, have you ever considered how many of these kids actually have Internet access? Or, if you expect them to do a lot of homework outside of school, that these kids are taking care of younger siblings. Or, you know, they don’t have that quiet place at home or inadequate lighting or supplies. So, I, it’s really, knowing your students. . . .knowing some of their obstacles, knowing kids are coming to school hungry. But you would think that a kid was just acting out if you didn’t know that population or have those conversations with kids.

### **Emerging Themes and Theory Generated**

In the preceding sections, the researcher outlined the experiences and perceptions of the participants in this study, which can be used to form a theory of communication expectation for principal internships. The common themes that emerged from the data of the interviews exemplified the importance of: communication, having a previous knowledge and experience or background with minority and low socioeconomic populations, having purposeful experiences while doing the principal internship, and building relationships with all stakeholders.

Figure 1 shows the major findings of this study in a diagram to better understand the connectedness of the themes and the overall theory that the researcher developed. The overall conclusion to this study is that communication is the key to building relationships with the supervisors, whether it is at the university level or the supervising principal over the internship, as well as the students, parents, and teachers. The experiences during the internship are critical to having success in the

principalship and need to be purposeful. All of the participants agreed that having background experiences in teaching minority and economically disadvantaged students was instrumental to the participants' success as an administrator.

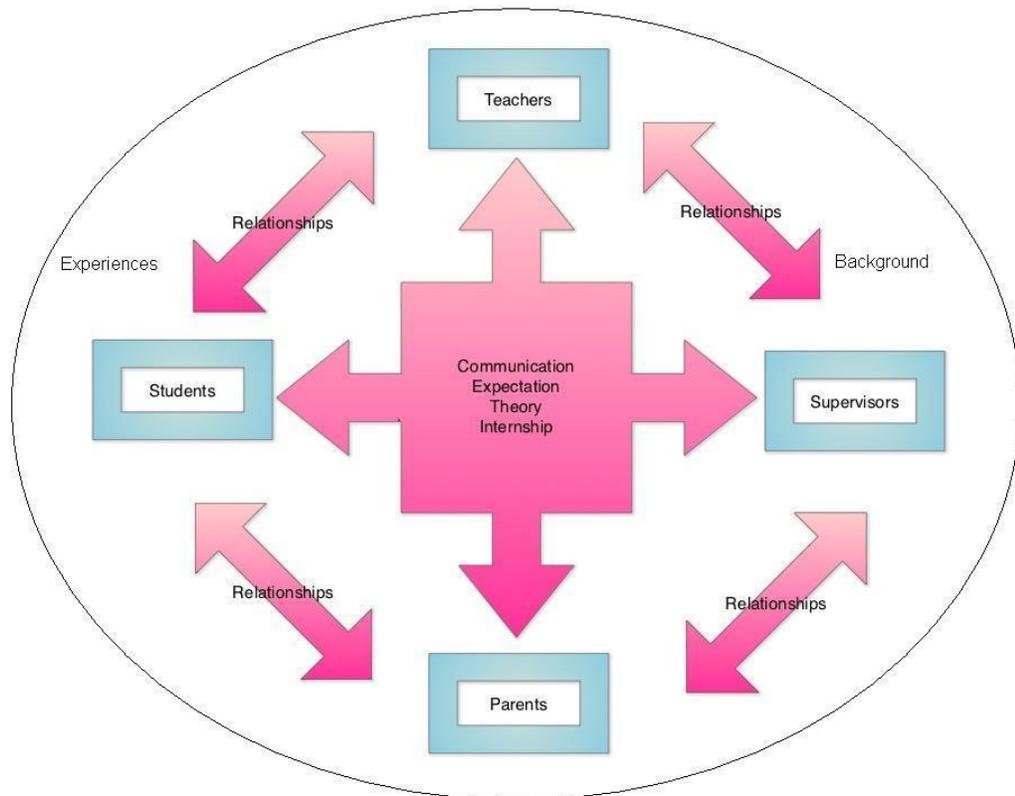


Figure 1. Communication Expectation Theory

### Summary

Chapter four presented the results of the data analysis and findings from the qualitative data. Four participants shared their perceptions and experiences about their

principal preparation program and internship and their interactions and learning opportunities working with minorities and economically disadvantaged student populations. The analysis of the data revealed emerging themes and generated a theory grounded in the data. The findings displayed the principal internship programs need some adjustments and improvements to assist aspiring administrators.

Chapter four addressed the research questions of this study which were (1) What were middle school administrators' internship experiences related to working with high minority and/or high poverty populations, (2) What factors of the middle school principals' internship were instrumental to the success of the middle school administrators working with high minority and/or high poverty populations, and (3) What theory emerges that explains the value of the principals' internship experiences to work successfully with high minority and/or high poverty student populations? The final chapter sought to provide understanding on the information gathered from the interviews. Implications and contributions to the field of education and recommendations for future research were also presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate Central Texas middle school administrators' experiences and perceptions of their principal preparation program and internship and to see if their program, more specifically their internship, prepared them to lead schools with high populations of minority and economically disadvantaged students. This information was especially important based on the literature that showed a growing trend in those student populations and because educational leaders make decisions that impact the lives of those student groups.

The results of this study depicted the participants' perceptions of their internship experiences as well as the factors that were instrumental to their success as an administrator in their schools. All of the participants currently work in schools with high populations of minorities and economically disadvantaged students. The participants completed a short survey and were interviewed, and the thorough transcriptions of the detailed interviews provided the researcher with an understanding to their preparation and internship experiences. It was discovered that the participants' internship experiences have a direct correlation and impact on their job performance at their school with those populations. The principal internship program should include practices that support participant experiences to improve their knowledge and skills. This study answered the following questions:

1. What were middle school administrators' internship experiences related to working with high minority and/ or high poverty populations?

2. What factors of the middle school principals' internship were instrumental to the success of the middle school administrators working with high minority and/ or high poverty populations?
3. What theory emerges that explains the value of principals' internship experiences to work successfully with high minority and/or high poverty student populations?

### **Summary of Findings**

Through a purposeful selection of participants and in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews, the researcher sought to understand the phenomenon of the participants' internship experiences with high populations of minority and economically disadvantaged students. Using analytical tools such as the use of questioning and probing, making constant comparisons, drawing on the researcher's personal experiences, thinking in terms of metaphors, as well as theoretical sampling and coding, the researcher was able to extrapolate themes and formulate a theory grounded in data. While coding the data, the researcher found important connections and relationships across the codes and concepts. The researcher wrote memos to keep track of ideas and relationships between the codes and emergent concepts. From the very first interview, constant comparison across data sources was critical to finding the emergent themes.

#### **Finding 1.**

Communication was a key factor that was a make or break situation for the participants in their internships and in their current job as they work with minority and

economically disadvantaged students. All of the participants claim that communication skills are essential to being successful as an administrator. Communication was truly reciprocal between the supervisor and himself for one participant during his internship, but was lacking for the other three participants. Interpersonal skills were stressed to be extremely valuable with all participants when building relationships and trust with all of the constituents.

**Finding 2.**

Previous experiences and background knowledge with minority and poverty student populations was another important finding from the data. All participants had experience with those populations by either teaching those student populations or having internship experiences with those populations. Additionally, one participant actually grew up as a minority in his community and understood the differences in equity. By having background knowledge and working experiences with minority and economically disadvantaged students, the participants all agree it is a crucial factor to their success as an administrator today.

**Finding 3.**

Having purposeful experiences during the principal internship was critical to the participants. All participants maintained that the internship was enlightening; some had more experiences with minority and economically disadvantaged students than others. For one participant, action research was his only avenue to work with at-risk students in which most of the students were minorities. Another participant had a very small number of students to work with and did not have a full inclusive

population of those students. The other two participants had many opportunities to work with those populations. Regardless of the amount of time and experiences the participants had with minorities and economically disadvantaged students, all stated the importance of working with those populations and building trust with them through prolonged engagement and conversations. Once you build trust with the students, then it flows over to the families and finally into the community.

**Finding 4.**

Without a doubt, the biggest finding of this study was that of building relationships with all stakeholders. Every participant discussed the importance of building relationships with the students to help them, the student and the administrator, be successful. In some cases, the participants discussed the lack of communication as being a barrier and challenge while in other situations, the participants embraced communication and the language barrier was not an issue. By building relationships with the students and communicating with them, the participants were able to ascertain bigger problems that some of their minority and poverty students were having outside of the school arena. Two of the participants spoke specifically about how teachers sometimes do not form a relationship with their students nor communicate with the parents of their students, which then cause some significant challenges.

**Theory Emerged.**

After analyzing all of the data and finding the emergent themes, the researcher formulated a theory that was grounded in the data – The Internship Communication

Expectation Theory. The researcher concluded that middle school administrators value and expect communication between all of the stakeholders in the school system, including students, teachers, parents, and supervisors. If you communicate with all of the parties involved then you build relationships. If you have background knowledge and experiences with minority and economically disadvantaged students, then you are more likely to be able to relate and build relationships and communicate with them.

### **Evaluating the Process and Theory**

Researchers and readers must evaluate the process of the research study. Evaluating the research process of a grounded theory, the reader should be able to make judgments about some of the components of the research process that led to the study.

The results of grounded theory are not a reporting of statistically significant probabilities but a set of probability statements about the relationship between concepts, or an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data (Glaser, 1998). To evaluate the theory, the reader should judge the research under the conditions by fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1998):

- *Fit* is another way of expressing validity. It has to do with how closely concepts fit with the incidents they are representing, and this is related to how thoroughly the constant comparison of incidents to concepts was done. Does the concept adequately explain the data which the theory reasons to express?

- *Relevance*. A relevant study deals with the real concern of participants, evokes "grab" (captures the attention), and is not only of academic interest. How relevant is the research to those being studied?
- *Workability*. Do the concepts begin to account for how the main concerns for those being studied are being continually resolved?
- *Modifiability*. A modifiable theory can be altered when new, relevant data is compared to existing data. A grounded theory is never right or wrong, it just has more or less fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability. How capable is the theory of incorporating new concepts from the data which is generated after the completion of the study?

Corbin and Strauss (2008) developed a general list of criteria drawn from multiple sources to help judge the quality of qualitative research. They state that “making judgments about the quality of qualitative research is difficult because so much depends upon who is doing the research, its purpose, and the method that is used” (p. 305). The criteria are:

- *Fit*. Do the findings resonate/fit with the experience of both the professionals for whom the research was intended and the participants who took part in the study?
- *Applicability*. It refers to the usefulness of the findings. Do the findings offer new explanations or insights? Can they be used to develop policy, change practice, and add to the knowledge base of a profession?
- *Concepts*. Concepts are important to develop common understandings.

- *Contextualization of concepts.* Without context of the concepts, the reader cannot fully understand why events occurred and ascertain the meaning of the experiences being described.
- *Logic.* Is there a logical flow of ideas? Do the findings make sense?
- *Depth.* Are the descriptive details rich and varied, and do they lift the findings out of the realm of the ordinary?
- *Variation.* Has variation been built into the findings?
- *Creativity.* Are the findings presented in an innovative manner? Does it say something new or put a twist on an old idea?
- *Sensitivity.* Did the researcher demonstrate sensitivity towards the participants and to the data? Did the analysis drive the research or was the research driven by preconceived ideas? Were the concepts generated before the data were collected?
- *Evidence of memos.* Researchers cannot possibly recall all of the insights and ideas generated during the analysis. There should be evidence of discussion of memos in the report (p. 305-307).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) state, “Additional criteria are necessary for evaluating the ‘credibility’ of descriptive findings or theory constructed using the research process” (p. 307). The criteria are listed in question form:

*Criterion 1.* How was the original sample selected? How did later sampling occur?

*Criterion 2.* What major categories emerged?

*Criterion 3.* What were some of the events, incidents, and/or actions (indicators) that pointed to some of these major categories?

*Criterion 4.* On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed? That is, how did theoretical formulations guide the data collection? After theoretical sampling was done, how representative did the categories prove to be of the data?

*Criterion 5.* What were some of the statements of relationships made during the analysis, and on what grounds were they formulated and validated?

*Criterion 6.* Were there instances when statements of relationships did not explain what was happening in the data (negative cases)? How were these discrepancies accounted for? Were statements of relationships modified?

*Criterion 7.* How and why was the core category selected? On what grounds is the final analytical decisions made?

*Criterion 8.* Are the concepts systematically related? To have theory, there must be systematic development of concepts and linkages of those concepts to form a theoretical explanation about some phenomenon.

*Criterion 9.* Is variation built into the theory?

*Criterion 10.* Are the conditions and consequences built into the study and explained?

*Criterion 11.* Has process been taken into account?

*Criterion 12.* Do the theoretical findings seem significant, and to what extent?

*Criterion 13.* Do the findings become part of the discussions and ideas exchanged among relevant social and professional groups? (p. 307-309)

The researcher has many of the components of the criteria listed above written in the study. The researcher feels that the theory derived from the data analysis is grounded in the data and “fits” with reality of the phenomenon that was studied.

### **Limitations**

In this study, there were many uncontrollable components identified as limitations. This study was limited due to the location and number of participants. First, the population of four participants studied was minimal, and it was assumed that the participants answered their interview questions honestly and accurately. The researcher created a set of criteria for possible participants. This criterion limited the number of participants for the study. Additionally, the number of participants was limited due to the nature of qualitative narrative study of the purposive sampling. Moreover, the experiences and perceptions of these participants may not reflect the same ideas and experiences of other administrators.

As with any qualitative research study, the researcher serves as the data collection instrument (Creswell, 2007). During the interviews, the researcher was a part of the world or phenomenon being studied, and what the participant said was influenced by the interviewer. The researcher brings personal bias to the study because she is an educator that has participated in a principal preparation and internship program as well as a mentor for multiple interns.

## **Implications**

The principal intern experience should be carefully designed with applicable assignments to build their knowledge and background. Without these experiences, prospective principals may not be competent and confident when they begin their first principalship. Interns need to be provided with authentic experiences that are relevant to the issues of improving student achievement. Mentors should also allow the interns to encounter difficult situations to utilize problem solving skills. Interns should be provided opportunities to lead change. The experiences that interns are afforded should in turn make them feel confident and able to lead a school. The university or program supervisors need to have close communications with the supervising principal or mentor of the intern. This communication would build a partnership and “buy-in” to provide applicable opportunities for meaningful activities and experiences. The mentor for the intern needs to commit the necessary time to help grow the intern and develop leadership skills. Self-reflection is a component that needs to be required from all stakeholders in the program and process of the internship. Self-assessments would be good tools that the preparation programs can use to improve and ensure that best practices are taking place.

While the results of this study proved that overall perceptions of the administrators’ internship experience was good, all of the participants reflected on what was missing or what was needed in their program. Some of the suggestions from the participants were:

1. One size does not fit all...provide appropriate experiential opportunity

2. Have interns swap schools
3. Understand your core values and ethics...why are you doing this? Candid conversations with the intern is critical
4. Witness quality leadership
5. Have a clear understanding of social justice with the history of education and where the inequities have been
6. Understand the systems of the school as they relate to money and how you can help students that cannot afford items
7. Instructional leadership best practices for minority and poverty groups
8. Getting to know a true understanding of poverty

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Research questions get answers and then more questions arise. There were a few recommendations for further research. This study highlighted four administrator's perspectives on their principal preparation and internship program and its impact on working successfully in schools with high minority and economically disadvantaged student populations. The findings in this study helped current administrators, as well as mentors and supervisors of the interns, on issues with the preparation program. There is little research emphasizing the impact of the principal preparation internship in respect to working with minority and poverty student populations and the effectiveness to work successfully with those populations as an administrator. Recommendation for future research also includes a replication of this study with an expansion to include all principals, not just middle school level. Since only four

participants were studied in this research, data could be collected state or nation-wide to gather more insight on working with these populations during the internship experience. Additionally, this study could be replicated but initiated at the end of the first year of employment as an administrator. More research studies should explore this phenomenon.

An additional study should be performed from the mentor or supervisor perspective on the internship component. It would be interesting to try to understand the other side of the internship component from the perspective of the mentor. Their lived experiences with interns under their watchful and guiding eye could prove to be powerful information for preparation programs

### **Summary**

This study was an attempt to understand the perceptions and experiences of middle school administrators' internships as they related to working with high populations of minorities and economically disadvantaged students. This paper offered some guidance for structuring a worthwhile learning experience that could prepare prospective administrators for schools with high populations of minorities and economically disadvantaged students. According to a report published by Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2005), there is a "sparsity of purposeful hands-on experiences that would prepare aspiring principals to lead the essential work of school improvement and student achievement prior to being placed at the helm of the school" (p.14). It is imperative that principal interns have field-based experiences that focus on real-world issues such as increasing numbers of minority and poverty student

populations. Likewise, the principal mentor/supervisor of the intern plays a valuable role during the internship process. According to Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) “Effective mentors give aspiring principals significant responsibilities to perform and opportunities to take risks without fear of reproach” (p. 489). It is the charge of the mentor/supervisor to help the principal intern in developing their leadership skills.

This study looked at only four participants’ internship experiences. Although this is a small number, the findings indicate a need to redesign or refocus the importance of the internship by including more learning opportunities and experiences dealing with social justice, equity, and multi-culturalism. As the demographics change in schools to include more minorities and more economically disadvantaged students, a focus should be to continue to study this phenomenon and the impact of successful administrators with successful internships.

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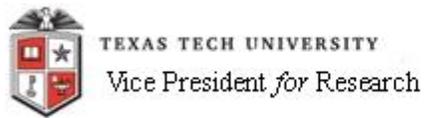
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**APPENDIX A**

**IRB APPROVAL**



February 3, 2013

Sylvia Mendez-Morse  
Curriculum & Instruction  
Mail Stop: 1071

Regarding: 503729 The Principal Internship Experience: Leaders for 21st Century Schools

Dr. Sylvia Mendez-Morse:

The Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee has approved your proposal referenced above. The approval is effective from February 3, 2013 to January 31, 2014. This expiration date must appear on all of your consent documents.

We will remind you of the pending expiration approximately eight weeks before January 31, 2014 and to update information about the project. If you request an extension, the proposal on file and the information you provide will be routed for continuing review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosemary Cogan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Rosemary Cogan, Ph.D., ABPP Protection of Human Subjects Committee

Box 41075 | Lubbock, Texas 79409-1075 | T 806.742.3905 | F 806.742.3947 | www.vpr.ttu.edu  
An EEO/Affirmative Action Institution

## **APPENDIX B**

### **CONSENT FORM**

You are being invited to participate in a qualitative study entitled: The Principal Internship Experience: Leaders for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Sylvia Mendez-Morse, Associate Professor in the Educational Leadership Program in the College of Education at Texas Tech University. She is the principal investigator and may be reached at (806) 742-1997 ext. 367.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of school administrators' principal preparation and internships and how well their programs prepared them to lead schools with high minority and high socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. The information and data obtained from the subjects will afford institutions of higher learning and principal preparation programs data to implement changes in their programs to help support and develop future administrators in education. Your participation in this study is beneficial to provide insight for preparation and internship programs.

If you agree to participate, you will first participate in an online survey through Survey Monkey that will take approximately 15 minutes. Following the initial survey, the researcher will conduct a semi-structured interview with you that will last approximately one hour. The interview will take place at the participant's choice of location. A follow up interview may be needed to clarify information. Total time for the study should be approximately one and a half hours. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for comparison purposes. Both the recording and transcriptions will be locked up at the researcher's home. Pseudonyms will take the place of your name, work place, and university to protect your identity. I will be the only one reviewing the data, and your confidentiality will remain intact and will remain anonymous.

There are no foreseeable risks involved if you choose to participate. Your participation is strictly voluntary. The refusal to participate involves no penalty or loss of benefits and you may discontinue participation at any time. Additionally, you may skip questions on the survey and interview at any time.

Dr. Mendez-Morse will answer any questions you may have about the study. For questions about your rights as a subject caused by this research, contact the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409, or (806) 742-2064.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Number

This consent form is only valid through January 31, 2014. Thank you for your time and participation.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What are your role and responsibilities?
2. What three items require the majority of your time?
3. What do you believe to be the biggest issues and challenges you face in your school?
4. Was your principal preparation program traditional in nature where you attended classes regularly and face to face? Or, did you take your classes online? Or, a mixed approach?
5. Describe your principal preparation program in respect to your classes.
6. When you interned as an administrator, who was your supervisor – the principal, assistant principal, or other?
7. While interning as an administrator, how much freedom or leeway did your supervisor give you when making decisions?
8. During your preparation classes, did you have a course that specifically discussed dealings with minority groups and/ or low socioeconomically disadvantaged students? If so, please explain.
9. During your internship, please explain any and all experiences that you were able to gain knowledge about working with minority and low socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

10. During your internship, is there something specific you would have wanted to have practiced or been educated more about when dealing with minority and low socioeconomically disadvantaged students? Explain.
11. Would you say your internship prepared you for working with high minority and high poverty populations and schools of the twenty-first century? Explain.
12. What do you consider to be important to be prepared for the principalship in schools with high minority and/ or high poverty student populations?
13. What do you foresee to be the biggest challenges for administrators for twenty-first century schools?

**APPENDIX D**

**SURVEY MONKEY ONLINE QUESTIONS**

1. What is your name, contact number, and what email address do you prefer?
2. What is your educational background? Degrees and certification?
3. How many years have you been in education?
4. How many years did you teach and what subject(s) and grade level(s)?
5. How many years have you been an administrator and what grade levels?
6. Have you been an assistant principal? If so, how long?
7. What is your present position and how long have you been there?
8. What year did you do your internship? How long was your internship?
9. Did your internship include working with a large population of minority and low socioeconomic students? If so, briefly describe.