A Narrative Study of Assistant Principal Decision-Making

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the qualitative, narrative study was to understand the decision-making process and framework development of the assistant principal. "To be successful, public school administrators must be able to understand the social setting of the school they are employed by and have the ability to make quick, appropriate decisions in a variety of unpredictable situations" (Lattuca, 2012, p. 10). However, most assistant principals convey they have had little training for the complexities of the dilemmas they face (Rintoul, 2010). This study sought to find how assistant principals develop their decision-making skills.

The research questions included:

1. How do assistant principals describe their decision-making process?

2. What resources do assistant principals rely upon to develop their decision-making process?

3. What relationship does pre-service training have with decision-making?

4. How does decision-making differ when working on a team with other assistant principals versus working as a solo assistant principal?

This study utilized semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of six assistant principals at secondary public school campuses in Texas. The assistant principals' experience in the role ranged from three to 18 years. Enrollment on the assistant principals' campuses ranged from 485 students to 2,981 students. Narrative research methods were used to collect and analyze data involving the six participants. Typically, the narrative methods involve an up-close examination a singular experience of one individual, yet offers an indicative example to the experiences many individuals

(Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) further describes the process as "collecting stories of personal experiences in the form of field texts such as interviews or conversations, retelling the stories based on narrative elements, rewriting the stories into a chronological sequence and incorporating the setting or place of the participants' experiences" (p. 189).

There were two main themes identified as contributing to the decision-making framework development of the assistant principal. These were: *experience and collaboration.* Subthemes identified as important in developing experience and collaboration are: *pre-service and ongoing training, relationship with principal and relationship with other assistant principals.* Assistant principals identified that they build experience in training, but that they also collaborate with their principal and other assistant principals to learn from the experience of others. Within these overarching themes, research data revealed ways in which the themes overlap and contribute to each other. Ultimately, the study found that assistant principals identify the most important resource in decision-making as experience. Assistant principals identify that they use their own experience as well as that of others in their decision-making. The identification of the experience of others as an important resource for assistant principals reveals the importance of collaboration. This identified resource shows the importance of the theme of the relationship with the principal and other assistant principals in the decision-making process.

This study adds to the body of knowledge regarding how assistant principals make decisions. The results of this study may be applicable to administrative training programs by increasing the effectiveness of assistant principal decision-making training.

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

You don't know what the right thing is all the time,
but you do the very best that you can with each situation
-    Catherine Marshall, 1993, p. 32.

Before one can understand the decision-making process of the assistant principal,

it is important to understand what the daily role of an assistant principal is. Troy (2009)

finds that, "School administrators face busy days filled with decisions, which cause

stressful days and sleepless nights filled with anguish" (p. 3). Each day, assistant

principals make decisions that impact the education and lives of students. Assistant

principals must rely on their own ethical decision-making guidelines in the decision-

making process. Little research has been done on the decision-making of the assistant

principal, while there has been a great deal on the decision-making of the principal. The

research available on the topic of which conceptual framework guides assistant

principals' decision-making is limited. Research exists regarding ethics and school

leaders, but there are few studies on ethics and the assistant principal (Troy, 2009). Since

assistant principals have more opportunities for direct interaction with students due to the

roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal, the decision-making framework that

assistant principals develop and use should be examined. This study investigated the

factors that help assistant principals develop their decision-making framework.

Results of this study will be useful for superintendents and other school leaders as

well as principal preparation programs and by extending the knowledge regarding

assistant principals. This knowledge has the potential to have substantial impacts on

education. Ultimately, the outcome could be assistant principals who are better prepared,

resulting in greater benefits for schools, students, and parents and through producing stronger students and graduates.

Ethical leadership is a major topic within the existing literature. "The most important responsibility of school principals is to have an ethical perception of school administration" (Kocaba, 2009, p. 126). Educational leaders are very involved in ethical decision-making. Given the continued pressure from all areas for accountability, higher standards and increased student achievement, it is becoming increasingly important that educational leaders pay attention to ethics and display a high ethical standard (Pipkin, 2000). Literature reviewed also included decision-making, the role of the assistant principal, the relationship between the principal and assistant principal and assistant principal training programs. Gaps in the literature reviewed for this study exist. In looking at how these factors impact decision-making, one area is overwhelmingly missing. The missing area is professional development for assistant principals, either in their preparation programs or in their continued professional development, for the role of the assistant principal. Much of the course work assistant principals participate in involves the principalship and its duties, with little focus on the actual role of the assistant principal. One specific area assistant principals need professional development is in decision-making, because the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal involve endless opportunities for decision-making. This study sought to fill the gaps regarding the decision-making framework development of the assistant principal and the importance of providing training for assistant principals on decision-making.

Statement of the Research Problem

This study explored the development of the decision-making framework of the assistant principal. Principal preparation programs are designed to qualify an educational professional to become a principal; however the first administrative job for most is that of the assistant principal. Most have had little or no training in the day to day work and decision-making they face (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). This research uncovered the ways in which the assistant principal fills the gap from his or her training and develops his or her own decision-making framework. Being the assistant to the principal means that there is a principal that one must report to and, many times, this is the individual that an assistant principal will use as a model for being an administrator. Because of this, it is important to understand the relationship between the principal and assistant principal. Sergiovanni (2006) states:

> Whenever there is an unequal distribution of power between two people,
> the relationship becomes a moral one. Whether intended or not,
> leadership involves an offer to control. The follower accepts this
> offer on the assumption that control will not be exploited. In this sense,
> leadership is not a right, but a responsibility (p. 5).

This relationship is important to keep in mind when researching the development of the assistant principal's decision-making framework. Does this moral relationship have the greatest impact on the assistant principal's decision-making, or are there other influences? How does the relationship with the principal translate to the decision-making framework development of the assistant principal?

The purpose of this study is to draw attention to the development process of the assistant principal's decision-making framework. The purpose of bringing this process of decision-making framework development to the forefront is to develop findings that can be utilized or extended by school districts and principal preparation programs to better prepare the administrative candidate for the assistant principalship, and support the principal as the developer of assistant principals. Sergiovanni (2006) tells us in *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective*, "the heart of leadership has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about, and is committed to that person's *personal vision*, to use a popular term" (p. 2). It is important to understand the relationship between the assistant principal and the principal, and how that relationship impacts the ethical decision-making of the assistant principal. However, it is also important to identify the other factors that contribute to the development of the decision-making framework. This study researched how assistant principals use resources to make decisions and identified what resources they use to accomplish this.

Autobiographical Statement

The investigator of this study has been in the field of education for 16 years. In this time, I have served in several educational leadership roles, including that of the assistant principal, and as a district central office administrator who works directly with supporting assistant principals in their roles. Throughout the 16 years, I have worked with many assistant principals, many of whom inspired this study. Most of the assistant principals I have worked with encouraged and added to my professional growth during. During the five years that I served as an assistant principal, this researcher was given the opportunity to participate in a leadership academy designed specifically for assistant

principals. While assistant principals were many times included in leadership professional development designed for principals, the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction recognized a need for development for the current role of assistant principal, not just the principalship. She developed a once a month "curriculum" for the assistant principals, which focused on the tasks that assistant principals would be dealing with during the school year. It became a professional learning community for the assistant principal.   Topics like organizing textbooks and keys, managing furniture needs, discipline and state testing were covered. This information was invaluable, and it was at this time that this researcher realized that many of these types of duties of the assistant principal were not covered in the educational leadership program that this researcher attended. In the current role at district central office, she works with supporting and training assistant principals in areas like state testing and instructional materials coordinating. In that capacity, it is clear that the training in pre-service and ongoing professional development is geared in many ways toward the role of principal.

The questioning of how assistant principals make decisions was derived from this experience. How can one make the right decision when they are not given the training opportunity to learn how to make those decisions? Is there a way to provide the training that would give future assistant principals decision-making skills in their pre-service training?

Overview of the Study

School leaders face high-stakes accountability, demands to educate the masses to the same level, and maintaining equality in a diverse environment. In order to understand the roles and responsibilities that assistant principals face today, one must look back at

the evolution of the assistant principal, which began with the principal role itself. As principals began to need help with their job, assistant principals were added. The exact origin of the term principal is difficult to trace, but early in our culture "principal" referred to a leader. In the first high school in Boston in 1821, the term principal was used for the head teacher. Moving forward as cities grew, central office personnel became further removed from the day to day operations of the school and the principal was a way for central office to stay involved, which transitioned the role of the principal to an administrative one (Morris, et al., as cited in Lattuca, 2012).

The emergence of the first real body of literature written specifically for school administrators began in the 1920's (Beck and Murphy, 1993). Beck and Murphy outline the transition of the role of the principal in their work *Understanding the Principalship: Methaphorical Themes 1920's- 1990's*. They outline the transition as the principal as the values broker in the 1920's, the manager in the 1930's, a democratic leader in the 1940's, an administrator guided by theory in the 1950's, a bureaucratic executive in the 1960's, a facilitator in the 1970's and finally in the 1980's the principal began to be seen as the instructional leader. Beck and Murphy found that the principalship is a role that is influenced by contemporary forces within, external factors and by the earlier conceptions of the role itself (Beck and Murphy, 1993). Definitions of the principal's roles and responsibilities have changed over time. The traditional definitions focused on the administrative processes and functions that must be performed for schools to work well. Tasks such as planning, organizing, leading and controlling were at the top of the list (Sergiovanni, 2006). Razick and Swanson tell us that the principal provides for the coordination of the instructional program at the building level, and appears to be a key

factor in establishing a common school culture and sense of community (Razick and Swanson, 2010). In recent years, more emphasis has been given to what principals in schools are supposed to accomplish. The idea behind this trend is to determine outcomes that students should achieve. "Presumably, principals in schools are expected to do whatever is necessary to achieve the outcomes" (Sergiovanni, 2006, p. 25). This creates a difference in effective practice and good practice. What principals do may work, but may not be right. This raises important moral questions (Sergiovanni, 2006).

In many situations, school leaders take the path of first serving as an assistant principal before taking on the principal role. It is during these years as assistant principal that the leaders develop and refine their decision-making skills. Few, if any, of the university programs for educational leaders prepare candidates for the role of assistant principal, however. In *Beginning the Assistant Principalship,* Daresh (2004) describes the certification programs curriculum as one that concerned "leadership" as opposed to "management." Marshall and Hooley (2006) found that "Formal coursework does not transform people into good educational leaders" and that there are "no definable criteria for selecting administrators" (p. 13). Marshall and Hooley also write that "university programs, state certification requirements, staff development, selection systems and professional association meetings and publications are often designed with only a best-guess effort to address the requirements of the assistant principalship" (p. 14). While some training programs have opportunities for principal candidates to experience administrative roles, usually in the form of some type of intern assignment, often these assignments are limited or ineffective (Lattuca, 2012). However, Portin et al., (2003) (as cited in Lattuca, 2012) concluded that the success of a principal begins with a collection

of opportunities for candidates to experience the realities of the principalship. In fact, Portin's study went on to find that most principals reported that experience was what prepared them for the complex role of the principalship, often dismissing their training. If this is the case, why don't all preparation programs include extensive internship opportunities? Research supports extending the length of the internship period. Portin et al., (2003) find that "Even though training programs have opportunity for students to experience administrative roles, usually through some sort of internship, far too often these internship experiences are either limited or ineffective." The Wallace Foundation, *Becoming a Leader: Preparing School Principals for Today's Schools,* (2008) agrees with these findings. The study found "research also puts strong emphasis on the need for well-crafted internships and other opportunities for authentic leadership experience during pre-service leadership training. Internships for aspiring principals are relatively common, but too often they are fleeting and involve observation rather than hands-on leadership opportunities (p. 6)." Wallace (2008) also found that "a wide body of research has cited persistent weaknesses in many university-based school leadership preparation programs, including: Weak connections between theory and practice and shallow or poorly defined internships and field-based experiences that are not sufficiently connected to the rest of the program (p. 8)." Lattuca describes his own preparation for the assistant principalship and states the following:

> What my preparation lacked though was an 'entry into the role' component
> related to task learning, socialization, and the general social reality of what
> assistant principals do and experience on a daily basis. Because of this, my
> socialization into the role was a rough and difficult journey. The longer I

acted as assistant principal the more comfortable I felt occupying the role

because I knew what to expect and how to respond, where situations were

not as "shocking" as they originally were. A more complete social component

 to my preparation, a reality or scenario based understanding of the social

aspects and volatility of the role, may have made my transition from teacher

to assistant principal more bearable (p. 152).

School administrators make a multitude of decisions every day. Many of these

are made on the spot, with little time for reflection. Ethical situations arise in the

decision-making, in which the leader faces ethical dilemmas, and these situations test the

emotional strength of the individuals involved. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) wrote

about the emerging field of *behavioral ethics*, a field which seeks to understand how

people behave when faced with ethical dilemmas. They find our ethical behavior is often

inconsistent and at time hypocritical. They also researched *bounded ethicality*, which

focuses on the psychological processes that lead even good people to engage in ethically

questionable behavior. This ethicality comes into play when individuals make decisions

that will harm others and decisions which are inconsistent with the decision-makers

beliefs. While there is a great deal of research regarding ethics and the principal, there

are few studies on ethics and decision-making in regard to the assistant principal. This

study identified the decision-making framework development process for the assistant

principal. Specifically, do assistant principals rely on resources like their certification

training, their principal and other co-workers, or on their own ethics when making

decisions, or do they rely completely on district or state policies?

Conceptual Framework

School administrators in Texas must follow a code of ethics which is part of the *Texas Administrative Code* (TAC) §247.1, and principals have their own set of standards required to demonstrate competency in when acquiring certification, §241.1. While researching this study, those standards were referenced and considered. These standards can and should be referred and adhered to by administrators when making decisions. Failure to comply with these standards can result in a loss of certification.

Several theories were examined in development of this proposed study. Studies by Kahneman and Kohlberg, proposed here, frame the study. Kahneman's "prospect theory" is a leading theory in this study. Kahneman, who received the 2002 Nobel Prize in economics for his work on this theory, describes a person's decision-making process when an element of risk is involved. He states there are two distinct systems of thinking; the first relies of perception, intuition and emotion and is often governed by habit and the second is a controlled approach that is effortful and involves reasoning. Kahneman finds that complex judgments and preferences are called "intuitive" if they come to mind quickly and effortlessly. Judgments and intentions can be modified or overridden in a more deliberate mode of operation. (Kahnenman, 2002).

Kohlberg discusses the theory of justice in moral decision-making. Kohlberg (1981) states "justice is not a rule or a set of rules, it is a moral principal…a mode of choosing that is universal, a rule of choosing that we want all people to adopt always in all situations" (p. 39). Kohlberg (1977) tells the reader that "whether we like it or not schooling is a moral enterprise" (p. 53). Kohlberg offers a clear structure for moral reasoning and decision-making. He offers a six stage model, in which the six stages must

be moved through sequentially and the individual must master a stage before moving to the next (Kohlberg, 1977). Stage one is described as obeying a set of rules to avoid punishment; stage two begins the impression that for something to be right it must be fair and therefore rules are followed because it is in the person's best interest; stage three is starts the concern with appearance, the individual wants to appear "good" or "moral;" stage four is an acknowledgement of the social structure that exists; stage five brings the ability to evaluate the "rightness" of rules and laws and finally stage six focuses on how rules affect others in society

The research available on the topic of which conceptual framework guides assistant principals' decision-making is limited. There is research on ethics and school leaders, but there are few studies on ethics and the assistant principal (Troy, 2009). The literature reviewed examined the conceptual framework of ethical decision-making, the role of the assistant principal and the relationship between the principal and assistant principal in regard to decision-making. An ethical framework provides a descriptive way of thinking during ethical decision-making and provides a rationale for decisions (Troy, 2009). Before one can understand the decision-making processes of the assistant principal, it is important to understand the daily role of an assistant principal; therefore this role was reviewed in the literature. Troy (2009) finds that, "School administrators face busy days filled with decisions, which cause stressful days and sleepless nights with anguish" (p. 3).

The concept of decisional capital is an important theory in this study. Fullen and Hargreaves (2012), describe decisional capital as involving making decisions "in complex situations on innumerable occasions with different problems and cases" (p.31).

The authors find after many years of practice and analyzing that practice and case examples with others, educational professionals know how to assess situations effectively. The work of Kohlberg and Kahnenman described in this chapter, as well as the work of Haidt, Bazerman and Tenbrunsel will create the conceptual framework for this study.

2 modes of Decision-Making	•Kahneman- "Prospect Theory": 1st-Perception and Intuition; 2nd Controlled with Reasoning •Haidit- Intuition comes first, Strategic Reasoning Second •Bazerman & Tenbrunsel- 2 modes: 1st -Automatic, Emotional ; 2nd- Slow, Concious and Logical
Experience	• Fullen and Hargraves- "Decisional Capital" Making decisions in complex situations on innemeralbe occasions with different problems and cases.
Ethics	• "Theory of Justice" Justice is a moral principle

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework illustrates the framework developed for this study. Combining the work of Kahneman, Haitit and Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, the researcher used these theories to understand the process of assistant principal decision-making as the assistant principals described their decision-making. The researcher used Fullan and Hargraves "Decisional Capital Theory" to process assistant principal experiences, and Kohlberg's "Theory of Justice" to examine moral principle.

Background of the Study

"*Ethics* concerns how we ought to live in a particular social context. *Professional ethics* concerns how we ought to conduct ourselves in the context of a particular profession." (Klinker, Thompson, & Blacker, 2010, p. 1) Haidt tells us in *The Righteous Mind*: *Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* "…the human mind is designed to do morality" and "that an obsession with righteousness (leading inevitably to self-righteousness) is the normal human condition" (Haidt, 2012, p. xix). Haidts' work also tells us that intuition comes first and strategic reasoning comes second. Is this also true for assistant principal decision-making?

This study is important because of the role assistant principals play in education. Assistant principals are the first line of defense. Students work directly with the assistant principals every day. Decisions that assistant principals make impact students immediately. Parents and other community members typically contact assistant principals first when they have a question or concern. What the assistant principal decides to do with those conversations will shape the way the parent or community member views the school, and can make or break a relationship. Teachers also work directly with the assistant principal on daily campus issues. It can be anything from a furniture request to an instructional issue, and the assistant principal has to make a decision, sometimes immediately, on how to react.

Fullan (2001) writes that "the role of the principal has in fact become dramatically more complex, overloaded, and unclear over the past decade" (p. 137). As the principal's role changes, the assistant principal role must change as well. As it does, the areas in

which assistant principals are making decisions will change. It is important to prepare assistant principals for the changing role and all areas of decision-making.

The second basis supporting this research is that most assistant principals go on to become principals or school leaders in central office roles. The decision-making they develop in their formative years as the assistant principal will carry over to these new roles. Most will influence the development of other leaders, including new assistant principals. It is imperative that we understand the decision-making process so that new administrators can be supported correctly while they are developing. The impact these leaders will have on students is exponential. In *Leading in a Culture of Change (2001),* Fullan tells us that no matter what the leadership style; every leader must have moral purpose to be effective. "Moral purpose is about both ends and means. In education, an important end is to make a difference in the lives of students. But the means of getting to that end are also crucial. If you don't treat others well and fairly, you will be a leader without followers" (Fullan, 2001, p. 13).

Literature reviewed for this study also included morality versus ethics. Morality has to do with what we should do as human beings, where ethics is related to specific social roles. (Klinker, Thompson & Blacker, 2010) "In sum, we get our ethics from how our social roles are conceived and our morality from how we see ourselves as human beings" (Klinker, Thompson & Blacker, 2010, p. 9). It seems that the social position of being the assistant principal has a great deal to do with the ethical decision-making, but can these ethical decisions be influenced by the morality of the individual human being?

In *Blind Spots: Why we Fail to do What's Right and What to do About it,* Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) discuss two cognitive systems and modes of decision-

making. They considered how individuals actually make decisions, rather than how they would make decisions in an ideal world. Their research shows our minds have two distinct modes of decision-making. The authors describe System One as our intuitive system of processing information, which is fast, automatic, effortless and emotional. System One is also efficient, which is why the vast majority of our decisions are made with System One. By comparison, System Two is slower, conscious, effortful and more logical. When a decision-maker is weighing costs and benefits of a course of action, they are using System Two. They find that it is common for people to make emotional system one decisions with ethical dilemmas. They further find that time pressure within an organization can create unethical behavior. Busier people are more likely to rely on System One thinking. (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011). This research would create the assumption that assistant principals, who are making quick decisions every day, are using System One decision-making. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel go on to state that System One thinking is sufficient for most decisions, but trusting "our gut" without ever using System Two thinking can create a difference in how we want to behave and how we actually behave. They find System Two thinking should be a part of our "most important decisions, including those with ethical import" (p. 36).

Research Questions

In order to explore the development of the decision-making process of the assistant principal, the following questions were developed:

1. How do assistant principals describe their decision-making process?

2. What resources do assistant principals rely upon to develop their decision-making process?

3. What relationship does pre-service training have with decision-making?

4. How does decision-making differ when working on a team with other assistant principals versus working as a solo assistant principal?

These questions are consistent with the purpose statement of the study, which is to bring to light the development process of the assistant principals' decision-making framework. Asking about the resources used by assistant principals to develop their decision-making framework helped the researcher to identify the importance of the co-worker relationship, the relationship with the principal and the pre-service program in the development of the decision-making framework. Inquiring about resources also helped the researcher to identify other resources that assistant principals rely on when making decisions. Asking assistant principals their opinion regarding their own pre-service program and the development of their decision-making framework gave great insight to the researcher regarding pre-service programs and their impact on assistant principal decision-making. This question also sheds light on the literature reported here regarding pre-service training and not only the influence of the training, but also ideas regarding how the training should be structured. Finally, giving the assistant principals an opportunity to describe their own decision-making process gave the researcher insight into the decision-making process and an opportunity to discover trends. This question helped to identify themes in the decision-making process, which guided the researcher in organizing the findings presented in this study.

In order to define the boundaries of the study, the study was limited to secondary assistant principals in Texas. The researcher interviewed assistant principals in several different regions to get the perspective of different areas of Texas. The participants in the study are current secondary public school assistant principals, not

retired or former assistant principals who have moved on to a principal or other leadership position. The researcher is choosing to only research the decision-making of the assistant principal, although there are many other leadership roles.

Delimitations of the Study

The study is limited to Texas secondary public schools, so therefore may not be generalized in other states. The study is limited to current assistant principals, therefore limiting the input of retired assistant principal or those who have moved into the role of principal or moved into other leadership positions. The study is further limited by the accuracy of the conceptual framework provided by the researcher. The focus of the study was not to identify the particular ethical framework used, but rather focused on how assistant principals develop and describe their decision-making framework, and identifying resources assistant principals use in their decision-making development process.

Definition of Terms

Assistant Principal: The assistant principal will be defined as the administrator who reports directly to the principal of a campus. This study will use the term assistant principal, while some administrators' titles may actually be vice or associate principal.

Principal: The campus level leader of the school.

Decision-Making Framework: The process that one uses to guide decision-making.

Discipline: Strategies used to maintain an orderly environment within a school.

Ethics: Ethics are defined as the standards of right and wrong.

Ethical dilemma: An ethical dilemma will be defined for this study as a situation in which an individual must make a decision, not necessarily between right and wrong, but a decision which could have several options.

Decision-Making Framework: A decision-making framework is defined as basic beliefs used to guide decision-making.

Resource: In this study, a resource is described as a tool that an assistant principal uses in their decision-making process.

Significance of the Study

First, this study is significant because it adds to the limited research regarding the assistant principal role. Most school leaders begin as assistant principals; however leadership preparation does not often focus on the role of the assistant principal. Understanding the role of assistant principal and the impact that assistant principal decision-making has on students is imperative. Second, this study is important because it contributes to our knowledge of the importance of the preparation programs for administrators. If preparation programs can better prepare an assistant principal for job specific decision-makin, the more that assistant principal will grow as a school leader in all areas, not just in decision-making. This would have the outcome of increasing the standard for decision-making among assistant principals.

Assistant principals work with students, teachers and parents on a daily basis. The impacts of the decisions they make affect the entire school and community. Assistant principals are often the first person contacted when a decision needs to be made and can impact the outcome of any given situation through their decision-making. However, there are fewer studies contributing to the literature on assistant principals than principals

and other administrative positions (Troy, 2009). In *The Assistant Principal: Leadership Choices and Challenges,* Marshall and Hooley (2006) inform the reader that many times assistant principals are seen as uninteresting, and as people on the bottom rung of the administrative ladder (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). This perception may be a misrepresentation. There is evidence that assistant principals are an important part of the functionality of a school, and not just an entry level position. However, it might seem that little thought is put into pre-service and ongoing training for the assistant principal. While historically the position was born of necessity in growing secondary schools at the turn of the century, it seems that now the position is critical in educational organizations. First, it is the first administrative position for most administrators. The more the role is developed, the more competent assistant principals will be. As most assistant principals go on to fill other leadership roles in their careers, the training they receive will go on to impact other school leaders. Second, assistant principals are often the front lines of maintaining the norms and rules of the school culture. Parents and students, as well as teachers, develop relationships with assistant principals that help to define school culture. Finally, and probably most significant to this study, assistant principals encounter daily the fundamental dilemmas of the school system (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The decisions assistant principals make have an impact on students every day. Many times these decisions are made quickly without time to reflect. The more prepared an assistant principal is to make these types of decisions, the more successful they will be.

In his dissertation, *Becoming an Administrator: The Socialization of the Assistant Principal Through an Autoethnographic Lens* (2012), Lattuca researches the origin of the principalship and the training programs used to prepare administrators. Lattuca (2012)

tells us that the role of the principal emerged from the need to manage teachers,

secretaries and janitors. (as cited in Seyfarth, 1999). He discusses five major

conclusions identified by Portin, Schneider, DeArmond and Gundlach (2003), (1) the

core of the principal's job is diagnosing the school's needs and determining how to meet

them; (2) leading in the following areas: instructional, cultural, managerial, human

resources, strategic , external development and micropolitical; (3) ensuring that

leadership happens, even if they aren't providing it; (4) governance structure of the

school affects the way leadership functions are performed; (5) and that principals learn by

doing and acquire skills on the job. This study goes on to report that the success of a

principal begins with training programs that have a collection of opportunities for

candidates to experience the realities of the principalship. Lattuca finds, "to be

successful, public school administrators must be able to understand the social setting of

the school they are employed by and have the ability to make quick, appropriate

decisions in a variety of unpredictable situations" (Lattuca, 2012, p. 10). Christie,

Thompson, & Whitely (2009) (as cited in Lattuca, 2012) add to the second contribution

of this study by finding: (1) pre-service programs need to be dramatically changed to

attract greater numbers of qualified applicants, (2) professional development should focus

on grooming principals to be instructional leaders, (3) policies should ensure that

mentoring and coaching happen on the job, and (4) continuous evaluation is the key.

Further, Christie et al. (2009) state that the training of administrators does not begin and

end with the preparation programs, but should be a life-long endeavor with mentoring

and ongoing professional development.

The results of this study can be used to improve the training that assistant principals receive pre-service and the training they receive throughout their careers. Ongoing support for school leaders is important. Research studies like this one can provide information for those providing training, such as central office administration to help guide their training. This study illustrates the disconnect between the pre-service training of assistant principals and the actual day to day job, which can provide valuable information for those deciding what training to include in such programs and what training to provide throughout the career of an assistant principal. The results of this study can potentially be used to increase the standard of decision-making among school leaders. By increasing the standard of decision-making, districts can expect more developed and prepared leaders.

This chapter presented the problem and purpose of the study. This chapter was organized into a statement of the research problem, an overview of the study, conceptual framework, background, research questions, the definitions of terms, significance, delimitations and limitations and an overview of the following chapters.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive literature exists both on ethical decision-making and school principals. However, the assistant principal is often overlooked in school leadership literature (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). A gap does exist in the amount of research available for the ethical decision-making of principals, and most notably, the ethical decision-making of the assistant principal. For this reason, the literature reviewed here covers many topics which are then sewn together to develop understanding of the assistant principal decision-making framework. The literature review may seem broad in scope, but this researcher found this necessary to develop the theoretical and conceptual framework required for this study.

The first nationwide research study regarding the assistant principal was conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (Glanz, 1994). The NAESP surveyed over 1,000 assistant principals with the goal of developing a composite of the average assistant principal, or a descriptive overview. "The forgotten man in the elementary school is frequently the assistant principal" (NAESP, 1970). Another study conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in 1991, found that the assistant principal is not given much attention in the literature and that almost nothing is said about the position in professional books or journals (NASSP, 1991). While this lack of literature created a gap in literature available on this topic, the researcher was able to discover research on decision-making, outside of the realm of education as well, and leadership roles other than the assistant principal in order to create a developed literature review. This chapter was organized as a review of the literature

available regarding ethical decision-making and the assistant principal, the development

of the assistant principal decision-making framework, the role of the assistant principal

historically and currently. The chapter begins with an introduction, a review of ethics, a

review of the ethical decision-making used by school administrators, a review of

available literature regarding the a review of the role of the assistant principal, literature

regarding the relationship of the assistant principal and principal, a review of the

literature based on the principal preparation programs and continued professional

development and finally a review of the decision-making process. Topics and descriptive

terms used to search for materials were ethics, ethical framework, ethical dilemmas,

decision-making, decision-making frameworks, educational leadership, assistant

principal and principal.

Ethics

Daniel Kanehman has extensively researched the decision-making and rational

choice.   While his work is not specifically related to education; it is invaluable in

research on this area. Kanehman finds most behavior is intuitive and the intuitive

impression will be the anchor for the judgment. Kahneman, (2002) describes two distinct

systems of thinking in decision-making. One relies on perception, intuition and emotion

and is governed by habit and the second which is controlled and is effortful and involves

reasoning. He also finds that judgments can be called intuitive if they come to mind

quickly and effortlessly, while they can be modified or overridden in a more deliberate

mode of operation. Kohlberg as well has contributed notable research on moral

development. Kolhberg offers an even more complex of justice in moral decision-

making. Kohlberg was a twentieth century philosopher who believed that moral

development began in childhood and continued through adolescence. He felt moral

development progressed as one thought about their own moral problems. His argument

was that the key to ethical growth is justice. "No matter how well a society's basic

institutions are devised, the failures of some actors to live up to the behavior which is

expected of them are bound to occur, if only for all kinds of accidental reasons"

(Hirschman, 1970, p. 1). Kohlberg (1977) states that "Whether we like it or not

schooling is a moral enterprise. Values issues abound in the content and process of

teaching. The interaction of adults and students within a social organization called a

school results in human conflict no less so than does such interaction in social

organizations labeled families" (p. 53). Kohlberg describes a six stage model, in which

the six stages are moved though sequentially and the individual must move through the

stages and master them before moving to the next.

Jonathan Haidt's work on ethics and morality is also not specifically related to

education, but rather to the human mind, morality and ethical decision-making. Haidts'

work provides an extensive look at the human mind and how it rationalizes the decisions

it makes. Haidt outlines three principles in The *Righteous Mind: Why Good People are*

Divided by Politics and Religion. The first principle is "Intuition comes first, strategic

reason second" (Haidt, 2012, p. xix). In fact, he goes on to write that moral intuitions

arise automatically and instantly, and those first intuitions go on to drive the future

reasoning. Haidt's second principle is "there is more to morality than harm and fairness"

(Haidt, 2012, p. xxi). This applies to the educational leader exponentially. When making

decisions in the day to day world of educational leadership, one cannot focus only on

"doing no harm" or "being fair." Third, Haidt presents the principle "morality binds and

blinds" (Haidt, 2012, p. xxii). Human nature can lead us to being "bound and blinded"

by our own morality. Haidt attempts to answer the question, where does morality come

from? He brings to the reader two common theories, nature and nurture. If nature drives

morality, morality is innate. However, the other side tells us that morality is learned in

childhood. Haidt then goes on to present his own theory, that morality is self-constructed

by children on the basis of their experience with harm. He goes on to conclude that

morality varies by culture, people have gut feelings that can drive their reasoning, and

that morality is in fact innate and learned (Haidt, 2012). A common thread running

through the works of these scholars is the idea of intuition guiding decision-making. Do

assistant principals rely on their own intuition when making ethical decisions? Can an

assistant principal's intuition be developed?

<div align="center">Decision-Making and School Administrators</div>

"To be successful, public school administrators must be able to understand the

social setting of the school they are employed by and have the ability to make quick,

appropriate decisions in a variety of unpredictable situations" (Lattuca, 2012, p.10).

However, most assistant principals argue they have had little training for the complexities

of the dilemmas they face (Rintoul, 2010).

The decision-making of school administrators, particularly principals, has been

studied extensively. The topic of ethical decision-making has been studied by many as

well. Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2001) book titled *Ethical leadership and Decision

Making*, outlines many of the theoretical perspectives associated with this topic. The

topic of ethics in education has been studied by Kocaba, notably his journal article, *Ethics

in School Administration*, (2009). Pipkin wrote about ethics as well in the journal article,

*A Call for Ethical Leadership, (*2009). Decision-making by school leaders has been

researched by McCray and Beachum (2006), in many articles regarding the dilemmas

presented by zero-tolerance policies. McCray and Beachum's (2006) work specifically

relates to the assistant principal, who most times is the administrator who works with

discipline and whose ethical decision-making could be in question. These authors all

write to the importance of leaders with high ethical standards.

The literature reviewed here includes research on the conceptual framework

behind the decision-making process, the relationship between the principal and assistant

principal and the role of the assistant principal. The literature reveals that assistant

principals frequently seem to identify with the ethical concept of care. It also reflects that

when assistant principals decide to seek out the assistance of a resource in decision-

making, they usually consult their principal as their resource (Troy, 2009). According to

Kocaba, (2009) "The most important responsibility of school principals is to have an

ethical perception of school administration." (p. 126). Educational leaders are very

involved in ethical decision-making. There is continued pressure from all areas for

accountability, higher standards and increased student achievement. It is becoming

increasingly important that educational leaders pay attention to ethics and display a high

standard of ethics (Pipkin, 2000).

Shapiro and Stefkovich quote Foster (1986) stating that "Each administrative

decision carries with it a restructuring of human life: that is why administration at its

heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas" (p.3). Shapiro and Stefkovish (2001) write

that "as society becomes more and more demographically diverse, educational

administrators will, more than ever, need to be able to develop, foster and lead tolerant

and democratic schools" (p. 4). Jonathan Haidt presents a theory which applies to the role of the educational leader. He states "We can believe almost anything that supports our team" (Haidt, 2012, p. 100). When thinking about the rules and policies we create for our schools, for example zero tolerance policies, we can see how this theory can apply to the assistant principal, or any school leader. Is the decision to use a zero tolerance policy in the best interest of the student, or the organization? One could argue that zero tolerance policies benefit the organization, but rarely benefit the student involved. However, zero tolerance policies remove the decision-making from the situation and create a sense of compliance. "The decisions we make on behalf of ourselves, our organizations, and society at large can create great harm. To improve our ethical judgement, we need to understand and accept the limitations of the human mind" (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011, p. 37). Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) found that prior to being faced with an ethical dilemma people predict they will make an ethical choice. When actually faced with an ethical dilemma, they make an unethical choice. Yet, most times when reflecting back on the decision, they still believe they are ethical people. In the prediction phase, one can clearly see the ethical aspect of the decision. However, at the time of the decision, some ethical fading- the process by which ethical dimensions are eliminated from a decision- occurs and the decider can no longer see the ethical dimension of the decision, but instead can be concerned with making the best business or legal decision (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011). It is very likely that ethical fading impacts the decision-making of the assistant principal, and this concern should be explored. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) also describe two modes of decision-making. They describe one which is fast, automatic, effortless and emotional while

another is slower, conscious, effortful and more logical. They find that it is common for people to make emotional decisions with the first method; fast, automatic, effortless and emotional, when faced with an ethical dilemma. Assistant principals would need to be masters of both types of decision-making in order to effectively make all the decisions they are faced within their roles and responsibilities. The common theme of many decisions becoming intuitive emerged from the literature.

The Role of the Assistant Principal

The assistant principal is considered a steppingstone to the principalship (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). While assistant principals typically are prepared and certified under the same standards as principals, in Texas the Texas Education Code, little research has been completed regarding the assistant principal. Some studies reviewed here are Niewenhuizen's (2011) study *Understanding the Complex Role of the Assistant Principals in Secondary Schools,* which included 22 assistant principal participants from the same school district, Jackman's (2009) research titled *Who Knew? An Autoethnography of a First Year Assistant Principal*, as well as books and articles which researched the role of the assistant principal. The assistant principal receives little attention in scholarly writing (Glanz, 2004). The assistant principal role itself is not clearly defined (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Glanz (2004) describes the role as an invisible and neglected one. Frequently, it is difficult to determine what an assistant principal actually does, but a common theme in the literature is that the schedule for an assistant principal is dictated by the events of the day (Olsen, 2000). The common theme of assistant principals being underrepresented in the research developed.

Jackman (2009) found in his study that the assistant principal first appeared early in the 20th century, with the main purpose being to relieve the principal of some of the administrative and management duties. Marshall and Hooley (2006) write that while the assistant principal role began when a school grew too large for one administrator to manage it, the assistant principal rarely has a well-defined job description, and along with assigned tasks, must pick up multiple jobs every hour and that the assistant principal is literally the assistant to the principal, shouldering much responsibility. Fullan (2001) writes that "the role of the principal has in fact become dramatically more complex, overloaded, and unclear over the past decade" (p. 137). As the role changes, so must the decision-making also change. Assistant principals are important in schools and have more extensive day to day action with teachers and students than principals (Marshall and Hooley, 2006). However, the role of the principal is widely covered in literature, but the role of the assistant principal is overlooked (Hausman et al, 2002). Because of the difference in the role of the principal and assistant principal, it is important to examine the role of the assistant principal, both historically and current.

In the book, *Beginning the Assistant Principalship,* Daresch (2004) describes what the assistant principal is doing as an administrator. He describes a day filled with disciplining students, sitting in on court hearings, keeping track of textbooks, and handling parking lot and bus duty before and after school. These tasks do not leave much time for leading the school in matters like curricular reform, staff development and vision. However, we all know that without curriculum, staff development and an aligned vision, we can't have a successful school. "Teachers know what they are supposed to do every day, they teach and principals are hired to lead, or at least 'run the school,'

counselors counsel. Assistant principals, on the other hand, do a lot of things that do not appear on the list of normal, routine activities of any school" (Daresch, 2009, p. 5). When looking specifically at what assistant principals do, we can begin to identify the special nature and inherent dilemmas in their job. While assistant principals do many of the same tasks as principals they spend a majority of their time dealing with issues of school management, student activities and services, community relations, personnel and curriculum and instruction. Assistant principals handle conferences with parents and students, which may be formal appointments or response to a crisis. A major responsibility is student discipline or behavior problems. With an increased interest on monitoring and improving teachers, assistant principals are now asked to do all of the above while also assisting with classroom observations. Generally, tasks require assistant principals to work closely with their principals and coordinate with other assistant principals (Marshall, 2006). Glanz (1994) found that at that time the role of the assistant principal had changed very little since its inception.

The assistant principal often spends their time handling behavior problems that are disruptive to the learning environment of the school (Hausman, et al., 2002). "Glue" accurately communicates the importance of the assistant principal to a school. "Undervalued and often unacknowledged, the AP is the often unseen, yet cohesive element that contributes to an efficient and effective school" (Glanz, 2004, p. 2). Discipline and attendance are time consuming responsibilities for the assistant principal and the assistant principal's day is unscheduled so that they are available to respond quickly when a crisis arises. When work time is taken up by student management, assistant principals have less time to work on curricular issues and mentoring of teachers

(Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Nieuwenhuizen (2011) found in her study of assistant principals that the role is complex and challenging, but necessary for the operation of secondary schools, and that the role had been invisible until recently as assistant principals are often working behind the scenes. Her study found no conclusive evidence of a specific set of duties, rather a broad set of duties: discipline, attendance, student activities, building supervision, master schedule, communication and cafeteria. However, these duties can leave little time for instructional leadership development.

Glanz (1994) studied over 100 assistant principals, asking them to rank their actual duties in order. His findings were the following list: student discipline, lunch duty, school scheduling, ordering text-books, parental conferences, assemblies, administrative duties, articulation, evaluation of teachers, student attendance, emergency arrangements, instructional media services, counseling pupils, school clubs, assisting PTA, formulating goals, staff development, faculty meetings, teacher training, instructional leadership, public relations, curriculum development, innovations and research, school budgeting and teacher selection. All of the authors agreed that the assistant principals' role is important to the day to day functioning of the school, while the actual roles and responsibilities varied.

The Relationship Between the Assistant Principal and Principal

The literature shows that the principal largely determines the assistant principal's responsibilities (Howard-Schwind, 2010). The assistant principalship appears to be considered an adjunct or ancillary position, subject to the whims of the principal (Glanz, 2004, Marshall & Hooley, 2006, Weller & Weller, 2002 as cited in Rintoul & Goulais, 2010). In *Through the Looking Glass: and Up Front and Personal Look at the World of*

the Assistant Principal, Mertz and McNeely (1999) tell the reader that "The school is a reflection of the principal, at least superficially. It is the principal who sets the tone, the climate and the direction of the school. If, in the worlds over which they have authority, the assistant principals play out their vision, values and beliefs, and they are neither shared with the principal or each other (if more than one), the potential for disunity and failure increases markedly, and it might seem to be, for no apparent reason" (p. 17). If this is the case, the role is an important one. Shared vision, values and beliefs are important and will affect the level of student success.

In Wong's (2009) study, *A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Working Relationship Between School Principals and Vice-Principals,* he finds that the principal is the school leader and the assistant supports the principal. His findings suggest that assistant principals can build strong working relationships with their principals. To do this, they must understand themselves, their principals and the nature of the superordinate/subordinate relationship. Madden's (2008) study found that most if not all of the duties and responsibilities of the assistant principal are assigned by the principal, which contributes to the role being one of management rather than leadership. Madden concludes that the key to successful assistant principals lies with their principal, because he or she assigns the duties and oversees the performance. Given the nature of the research in this area, it seems one can derive that the relationship between the principal and the assistant principal can be a determining factor in the success of the assistant principal.

The assistant principalship is heavily influenced and often can be defined by the principal. The relationship of the assistant principal to the building principals is

important to understand (McIntyre, 1998). It is important for the principal and assistant principal to complement each other to become a stronger team (Larose, 1987).

Based on Nieuwenhuizen's (2011) conclusions, building principals control the duties of their assistant principals. The assistant principal is expected to be loyal to the principal and as such must modify their perspectives, ethics and morality to conform to those of the school administration (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Assistant principals started as subordinate to principals with little or no independent formal authority (Glanz, 1994). Principals also control the opportunities that assistant principals have for other forms of leadership. The power imbalance the principal has over the assistant principal can result in a negative cycle.

<div align="center">

Assistant Principal Preparation Programs and

Continued Professional Development

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By analyzing the decision-making of assistant principals, and what framework for decision-making is used by assistant principals, some very positive outcomes can be expected. The research done in this study creates a basis for improvement of pre-service preparation programs and for better on-going professional development for school leaders. Assistant principals themselves can improve their own abilities in decision-making when presented with literature and training to support their development in this area. The research showed many trends in the development of the assistant principal, and the development of zero tolerance policies. In looking at how these factors impact decision-making, one area is overwhelmingly missing. The missing area is professional development for assistant principals, either in their preparation programs or in their continued professional development, for the role of the assistant principal. Much of the

course work assistant principals participate in involves the principalship and its duties, with little focus on the actual role of the assistant principal. One specific area assistant principals need professional development is in decision-making.

In his study, Lattuca (2012) found that many programs do not appropriately train individuals for the realities of the administrative role. A similar study from Christie et al. (2009) finds that administrator training should be life-long and require on site mentoring and ongoing professional development. Lattuca (2012) himself states that his preparation program was excellent with the theoretical aspect of administration, but lacked an entry into the role. This type of training would have included "task learning, socialization, and the general social reality of what assistant principals do and experience on a daily basis" (p.152). He concluded that a more complete social component to his preparation, with reality or scenario based understanding of the social aspects of the role would have made the transition more bearable. This researcher would argue that not only would such a preparation program make the transition more bearable, but also more successful.

Olson (2000) finds that researchers agree that assistant principals are not properly prepared for the principalship and that training that is specific to the role of the assistant principal is also lacking. In their 2012 study, *The Job Realities of Beginning and Experienced Assistant Principals,* Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewki find that most leadership preparation programs focus on the principalship when in fact most school leaders are likely to serve as assistant principals first. Their study revealed that assistant principal training should include: prioritizing responsibilities and using time efficiently; assessing and developing personal skills, including self-awareness, emotional intelligence and

conflict resolution; and to practice instructional leadership, by assisting and supporting teachers and improving student learning (Barnett, et al., 2012).

Jackman (2009) found in his study that university programs do not create an understanding of the vital position of the assistant principal. University programs do not teach the difference between the principal and assistant principal. Most educational leadership programs tend to focus on creating building leaders. Jackman (2009) further concludes that the administrative program should place a much greater focus on understanding student behavior and developing and understanding of discipline programs and methodology. New administrators need training on working with parents, so they become a resource for parents, on issues such as attendance, dress code, cyber bullying and working with diverse students.

In Howard-Schwind's (2010) study, *Instructional Leadership Responsibilities of Assistant Principals in Large Texas High Schools,* she concludes that districts and principals need to allow their assistant principals the same professional development and support principals receive. Abebe, et al., (2010) tell us that assistant principals need professional development in order to remain focused, responsive and effective. Armstrong (2010) found that assistant principals are almost immediately placed at the frontline of the school and expected to assume responsibility for duties and problems they have no preparation for. The study included the use of metaphors like "sink or swim" and "baptism by fire" to describe the start of the career of the assistant principal. This lack of training and support can lead to errors.

Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) suggest that decision feedback is an effective means of improving one's decision-making. They also suggest that debriefing your

decisions on a regular basis, with a colleague playing the devil's advocate can improve your accuracy. These authors agree that assistant principal preparation programs are lacking in areas of training needed by assistant principals and that ongoing professional development is essential to the success of assistant principals. These suggestions would be interesting for the ongoing professional development of assistant principals. They could debrief with other assistant principals, as well as their own principal.

Decision-Making

In *Brainwork: The Neuroscience Behind How we Lead Others,* Sousa (2012) describes the emotional brain and the decision-making process. When an individual makes a decision that turns out to be an error, the future recognition of the mistake activates the brain's *anterior cingulate cortex,* which is the region of the brain involved in the detection of errors. Since an error is an unexpected outcome, the brain will generate a special electrical signal and send it to direct conscious attention to the errors. This process activates the hypothalamus, which sends adrenaline into the bloodstream increases the heart rate and tightens the muscles. This reaction causes the disappointment over the error to become a strong emotional even, which can cause an individual to become angry with his or herself. From this point forward, the lesson learned from the event will be useful when making further decisions. If this process didn't take place, we would not learn from our mistakes.

We can easily feel overloaded by decisions and can find ourselves with decisions racing through our minds. Scholars of decision-making argue that people, especially professionals, deal with the problems posed by all these decisions by relying on past experiences. Scholars even find patterns in decisions that have occurred in pervious

situations (Klein, 1998 as cited in LeTendre, 2006). Assistant principals are challenged

with the task or satisfying multiple and diverse stakeholders and are for the most part,

untrained for the moral dilemmas they are faced with (Rintoul & Goulas, 2010).

Ethical decision-making can cause individuals to face tough moral dilemmas.

They can arise without warning and require moral, ethical and wise decision-making. To

be able to make those decisions, an individual needs guidelines and a framework to work

from. Sousa (2012) suggests four attributes that are common to decisions involving

ethical questions: (1) The decision is rooted in core, shared values, (2) The decision

centers on right verses right dilemmas rather that right versus wrong, (3) the decision

provides clear, compelling principles for resolving the problem and (4) the decision is

infused with moral courage (Sousa, 2012). "Ethical behavior is based on your moral

code- your sense of right and wrong. It means not only doing what is right, but refusing

to do what is wrong. Taking the simpler way out is often easier than doing what is

ethical" (Sousa, 2012, p. 105).

Redish (2013) wrote *The Mind Within the Brain: How We Make Decisions and

How Decisions Go Wrong.* He defines decision as the conscious deliberation over

multiple choices and that decisions we make arise from an interaction of multiple

decision-making systems. Two of these systems are the episodic future thinking and

deliberative systems. He also finds that we don't always notice what drives our decision-

making processes. We rationalize it and fill in reasons from logical perspectives. Redish

tells the reader that we should not assume all decision-making is rational or deliberative.

He defines decision-making as the selection of an action.

Marshall & Hooley (2006) write that in the process and training of individuals; organizations teach a person how to make decisions the way they would like him to decide. People become socialized to think and work within the status quo. Those who raise questions and challenge the system are seem more as misfits than potential leaders. People who are selected as school administrators are likely to be those who are similar to those who are already administrators. Therefore the tendency of school administrators to make safe decisions exists. They go on to generalize that those administrators who make safe decisions will avoid ventures that will decrease their control and increase risk. They will bend to political pressure when uncertain of the decision to make. LeTendre (2006) argues that assistant principals make decisions quickly by relying on their past experiences. He writes that their decisions are much more likely to be affected by institutional scripts.

Bazerman and Tenrunsel (2011) describe a variable in decision-making that could be an influence on assistant principals. The *identifiable victim effect* refers to the finding that people are far more concerned with and show more sympathy for the identifiable victim. Identifiable victims are defined as specific people, while statistical victims are unknown, unspecified people. The effect of the identifiable victim could impact the ethical decision-making of assistant principals in many ways. How often do school leaders look at data from the state regarding a high stakes test results, including subpopulations of students? However, do we ever make a list of the actual names of the students in those subpopulations? When looking at discipline data, do we consider the individual student, or do we just report 90 freshmen went to ISS this year?

Expected to be decision-makers, assistant principals must focus on the agenda of others, parents, principals and teachers (Rintoul & Goulas, 2010). Because assistant principals make moral and ethical decisions in a rapidly changing society, the effort should be to encourage new behaviors that actually allow assistant principals to make a difference in students (Abebe et al., 2010).

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The literature review preceding this chapter has shown that researchers seek to understand how school administrators, including assistant principals, carry out their day to day decision-making. However, one of the least researched and least discussed roles in educational leadership is the role of the assistant principal. While much is reviewed regarding the role of the principal and decision-making, little is known regarding the ethical decision-making of the assistant principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Glanz, 1994, 2004.) The purpose of chapter three is to describe the methodology that will be used to research the questions in this study. This chapter includes the research design, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, and a brief summary. The chapter is organized as, problem and purpose, research questions, population and sample, design, instrument design, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, researcher role and summary.

Problem and Purpose of the Study

The literature review presented here outlined the lack of evidence regarding the assistant principal. More research is needed on assistant principals, and specifically on their decision-making framework. This purpose of this study was to research and discover the framework of the decision-making of assistant principals.

Instrument Design

The interview structure that most complimented this study was the semi-structured or semi-standardized interview. Berg's (2009) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, illustrates the subtle differences in the standardized and semi-standardized interview. Berg states, "The major difference between these different interview structures is their degree of rigidity with regard to presentational structure" (p. 104). Most important to this study is the use of more flexible questions, rather than questions being asked exactly the same each time and the interviewer being able to add or delete probes to the interview between subjects, rather than a more structured interview where no additional questions could be added. Berg (2009) goes on to describe the semi-standard interview as "involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and special topics… interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions" (p. 107). For this study, the semi structured interview protocol (Appendix A) was designed. This semi structured interview design gave the researcher the opportunity to be flexible in the interview process in order to yield the most important information from each respondent.

Qualitative Methods

Yin (2011) tells us in *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, that there are five features in qualitative research:

1) Studying the meanings of peoples' lives under real world conditions;

2) Representing the views and perspectives of the people (participants) in the study;

3) Covering the contextual conditions within which people live;

4) Contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior;

5) Striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone. (Yin, 2011) Yin describes variations of qualitative research. Narrative research is described as constructing a narrative rendition of the findings from a real world setting and participants to accentuate a sense of "being there".

Based on the list from Yin (2011), this research design took on a qualitative methodology, with narrative variation. When selecting a methodology, it is important to review the features of the methodologies. Yin (2011) also list the competencies needed to do qualitative research well. He lists listening, knowing about your topic of study, asking good questions, caring about your data, and persevering. This list of competencies required for effective qualitative research describe what was needed for this study.

Design of the Study

Qualitative methodology, with a narrative variation was best suited for this research project because the goal of the research is to determine what process and in what ways assistant principals develop their decision-making. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as "mulimethod in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (p. 2). Creswell (2013) identifies five components that should be included as part of the introduction to a well-conducted qualitative research study. These components include: (1) a clearly defined topic, (2) a well-stated research problem, (3) a literature review justifying the problem, (4) identification of gaps and deficiencies in the existing literature, and (5) a justification and rationale for why the problem is an important area of research (Creswell, 2013, p. 132).

The narrative approach is an up-close examination a singular experience of one individual, yet offers an indicative example to the experiences many individuals. Creswell (2013) describes the overall and embedded writing structures of the narrative approach. Creswell (2013) lists the overall writing structure as "Reporting what participants said (themes), how they said it (order of their story), or how they interacted with others (dialogue and performance) while he lists the embedded writing structure of narrative research to be "Dialogues or conversations" (Riessman, 2008 as cited by Creswell, 2013, p. 221). Following Creswell's model, the researcher was able to have respondents identify themes by telling their own story. The study was conducted by using a semi-structured interview with participants who were selected because they are current secondary, public school assistant principals. After interviewing the participants, the researcher hand coded the data into categories. This allowed the researcher to identify themes and significant phrases and statements made by the participants. The comments were organized into the four research questions to better understand the process assistant principals use to make decisions. Using the actual words of the participants, the researcher was able to identify the process assistant principals use to make decisions and the resources that assistant principals identify they utilize as they make decisions. Approval was granted from Texas Tech Protection of Human Subjects Committee in December of 2014. (Appendix B)

Population and Sample

This study used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is defined by Maxwell (2005) as a strategy in which particular settings, persons or events and deliberately selected for the important information they can provide.   Based on this sampling style,

the goal was to choose practicing assistant principals who are either developing or have already developed their style of decision-making. Creswell (2007) finds the researcher should reflect upon who to sample more than how many, with a guideline being to study a few individuals, while collecting extensive detail about each one. The subjects chosen for this study are assistant principals from both rural and urban campuses in Texas. The urban campuses were selected because of the number of assistant principals who work together and the impact those relationships can have on the development of the ethical decision-making framework. The rural campuses were chosen to study the situation where assistant principals frequently work alone and without others to build their ethical decision-making framework with. This researcher contacted, by email, approximately twenty assistant principals, based on the criteria of being a current assistant principal at a secondary public school. Recommendations from administrators the researcher knows were used to contact some of the the initial twenty, while others were contacted through their school websites. An invitation letter (Appendix B) and a copy of sample questions were sent to each assistant principal. Once the assistant principals responded with interest in participating, interviews were scheduled. Of the twenty contacted, twelve responded, with nine expressing interest in participating. Six were interviewed. Six were chosen to be interviewed in order to include an equal number of male and female assistant principals, an equal number of rural and urban (Rural being defined as a community with less than 50,000 and urban a community with more than 50,000) and an equal number of smaller campus (less than 1000 students) and larger campuses (more than 1000 students). This eliminated any factor such as sex, location or size of school contributing to findings.

This effort extends the lens of the assistant principal from the career assistant principals to those with ambition to become building principals.

Years in Education	Number of Students	Rural or Urban Location	Campus Grade Levels	Male or Female	Years as an Assistant Principal
25	904	Rural	9-12	Female	17
16	485	Rural	9-12	Male	3
18	2050	Urban	9-12	Female	18
13	973	Urban	6-8	Female	6
12	1000	Rural	9-12	Male	8
8.5	2981	Urban	9-12	Male	13

Table 1: Participant Data

Data Collection

After the researcher received consent for the interview and the interview was scheduled, the researcher sent an email reminding the participants of the date and time of the interview along with assurance of confidentiality. Sample questions that might be asked during the interview were emailed as well. Each interview was scheduled to last one hour, and most were completed within one hour. Participants chose the location of the interview. Follow-up phone calls or emails were used as additional information was needed. Risk to participants was minimal or non-existent. As the interview commenced, the researcher reviewed the consent process, the agreement to tape the interview, and the confidentiality of the respondent's identity. Interviews were recorded so that during the interview process the interviewer could focus on the participant and the conversation, and

listen to the recording and transcribe the conversation at a later time. It was during the interview process that the researcher determined the exact number of respondents to interview. While there were three additional respondents willing to be interviewed, the data collected began to show patterns and trends that were being replicated in the interviews, eliminating the need for additional interviews. The researcher felt the interviews reached the point of saturation with the participants interviewed.

Data Analysis

The first step in data analysis was describing the participants. Using descriptive statistics, the researcher described the participants' demographic data, such as but not limited to: sex, years of experience and number of co-assistant principals currently working with. Following the demographic data organization, the next step was using a comparative model. Transcriptions of the interviews were compared to look for themes. Interviews were transcribed so that the researcher could better participate in the conversation during the interview and not be focused on writing notes and recording information. The themes came together as the findings of the study.

Once information was evaluated from the interviews, the researcher was able to continue to study the chosen subjects or cases and look for trends and similarities. This allowed for deep description of the development process of the decision-making framework. The data collected in the narrative study should be analyzed for the story the respondent has to tell, in the chronological order of events, detailing turning points and epiphanies. (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) further describes the process with the following elements "collecting stories of personal experiences in the form of field texts such as interviews or conversations, retelling the stories based on narrative elements,

rewriting the stories into a chronological sequence and incorporating the setting or place of the participants' experiences" (p. 189). Creswell's (2013) table 8.2 outlines the data analysis and representations by research approaches. He outlines the narrative approach as:

- Create and organize files for data

- Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes

- Describes the story of objective set of experiences and place it in a chronology

- Identify stories

- Locate epiphanies

- Identify contextual materials

- Interpret the larger meaning of the story

- Present narration focusing on processes, theories and unique and general features of the life (p. 190-191)

The researcher used identified themes to categorize statements made by respondents. Using this method, the researcher identified trends and was able to compare these findings to those findings of similar studies. The researcher identified over 120 significant statements made by the participants during the interviews. These statements were categorized and sorted into the research categories, which supported the research questions The comments were grouped together to identify themes and trends.

Validity and Transferability

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) define generalizability as the external validity, or the degree results could be generalized to the area of study. Because the

study encompassed assistant principals only the state in which the researcher lives, the question to examine would be is there any reason why the information gathered from the state in which the study is conducted would not transfer to those outside the state? It is likely the gathered information would accomplish generalizability, but due to differences in training requirements and school systems in general the generalizability may not extend outside of Texas. Transferability could be considered in states where the education training and certification is similar to Texas.

Borg, Gall & Gall discuss the importance of trustworthiness in *Educational Research: An Introduction.* The researcher used the measure of process validity, which they describe as the adequacy of the processes used in different phases of research. It was important that the data collection, analysis and interpretation are guarded against bias.

Role of the Researcher

After developing research questions, the researcher developed an interview protocol. After the proposal process, the researcher used input from the committee to develop the questions on the protocol into a semi-structured interview. The researcher then interviewed an assistant principal in her current district to pilot the questions. After this interview, the researcher was able to further develop the interview protocol and questions list.

Respondents were assured of anonymity with no identifiable information included in the findings, other than the demographic data. Complete disclosure informed the participant of the intent and purpose of the study. The researcher created masking

identities for interview participants, disaggregated the data, looked for themes and wrote a descriptive narrative.

Summary

This chapter explained the methodology of the study of assistant principals' decision-making framework. The problem and purpose of the study were restated. The research design, instrumentation, data collection and data analysis procedures were included.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study which explored the decision-making of the assistant principal. This qualitative, narrative study utilized a purposeful sample of six assistant principals in Texas. The research questions were:

1.   How do assistant principals describe their decision-making process?

2.   What resources do assistant principals rely upon to develop their decision-making process?

3.   What relationship does pre-service training have with decision-making?

4.   How does decision-making differ when working on a team with other assistant principals versus working as a solo assistant principal?

This chapter is divided into three sections; and overview of the study, and overview of the data analysis and a summary of the findings.

Study Overview

After contacting 20 assistant principals, the researcher found six candidates who met the inclusion criteria. The participants' assistant principal experience ranged from three to 17 years while their total years in education ranged from 12-25 years. The participants were either current Middle School or High School assistant principals in Texas. The number of students in the school where the assistant principals currently work ranged from 485 to 2981. An equal number of male and female respondents were

chosen. The number of assistant principals at the campuses where the respondents work ranged from one to seven.

Years in Education	Number of Students	Rural or Urban Location	Campus Grade Levels	Male or Female	Years as an Assistant Principal
25	904	Rural	9-12	Female	17
16	485	Rural	9-12	Male	3
18	2050	Urban	9-12	Female	18
13	973	Urban	6-8	Female	6
12	1000	Rural	9-12	Male	8
8.5	2981	Urban	9-12	Male	13

Table 1: Participant Data

Additionally, most of the participants reported they served in leadership positions as teachers, such as department head, RTI or testing coordinator. Half of the respondents were also previously coaches, and all three stated they felt coaching prepared them for the leadership role.

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview to study the process of decision-making development in assistant principals. The time and location of the interviews were chosen by the participant, with each lasting approximately 45 – 60 minutes. Each interview was audio taped. The audio taped interviews were then transcribed by the researcher. After one of the interviews, a topic was discussed that had not been discussed with previous respondents, due to the nature of the semi structured interview, and email was utilized to ask the previous respondents about the topic. This data was added to each respondent's transcribed interview.

Data Analysis Overview

The analysis of the data was completed by using Creswell's method of the narrative approach. Once information was evaluated from the interviews, the researcher was able to continue to study the chosen subjects or cases and look for trends and similarities. This allowed for deep description of the development process of the decision-making framework. The data collected in the narrative study should be analyzed for the story the respondent has to tell, in the chronological order of events, detailing turning points and epiphanies. (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) further describes the process with the following elements "collecting stories of personal experiences in the form of field texts such as interviews or conversations, retelling the stories based on narrative elements, rewriting the stories into a chronological sequence and incorporating the setting or place of the participants' experiences" (p. 189). Creswell's (2013) table 8.2 outlines the data analysis and representations by research approaches. The outlines the narrative approach as

- Create and organize files for data

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- Identify stories

- Locate epiphanies

- Identify contextual materials

- Interpret the larger meaning of the story

- Present narration focusing on processes, theories and unique and general features of the life (p. 190-191)

While reading the transcripts of the interviews, the researcher searched for themes by hand-coding the data. Comments were coded to fit into the following pre-identified categories: experience, pre-service training, relationship with principal, relationship with other APs and types of decision and resources, in order to sort the data into the research questions. This process identified 120 significant statements or phrases. The statements were then sorted into the research questions, and grouped together. A graphic organizer was created to organize the identified themes and subthemes (see Figure 2: Identified Themes) in order to display the themes and understand the process the assistant principal goes through when making a decision. Figure 2: Identified Themes illustrates that as assistant principals make decision they use their experience and collaboration with others. The arrow connecting these two themes is a double headed arrow to illustrate that these two resources are connected and shared. The subthemes of pre-service and ongoing training and relationships with the principal and assistant principal also use the double headed arrow to illustrate the connection that is ongoing and goes back and forth. As the collaboration develops the relationship, assistant principals learn from each other and share with each other their own experiences.
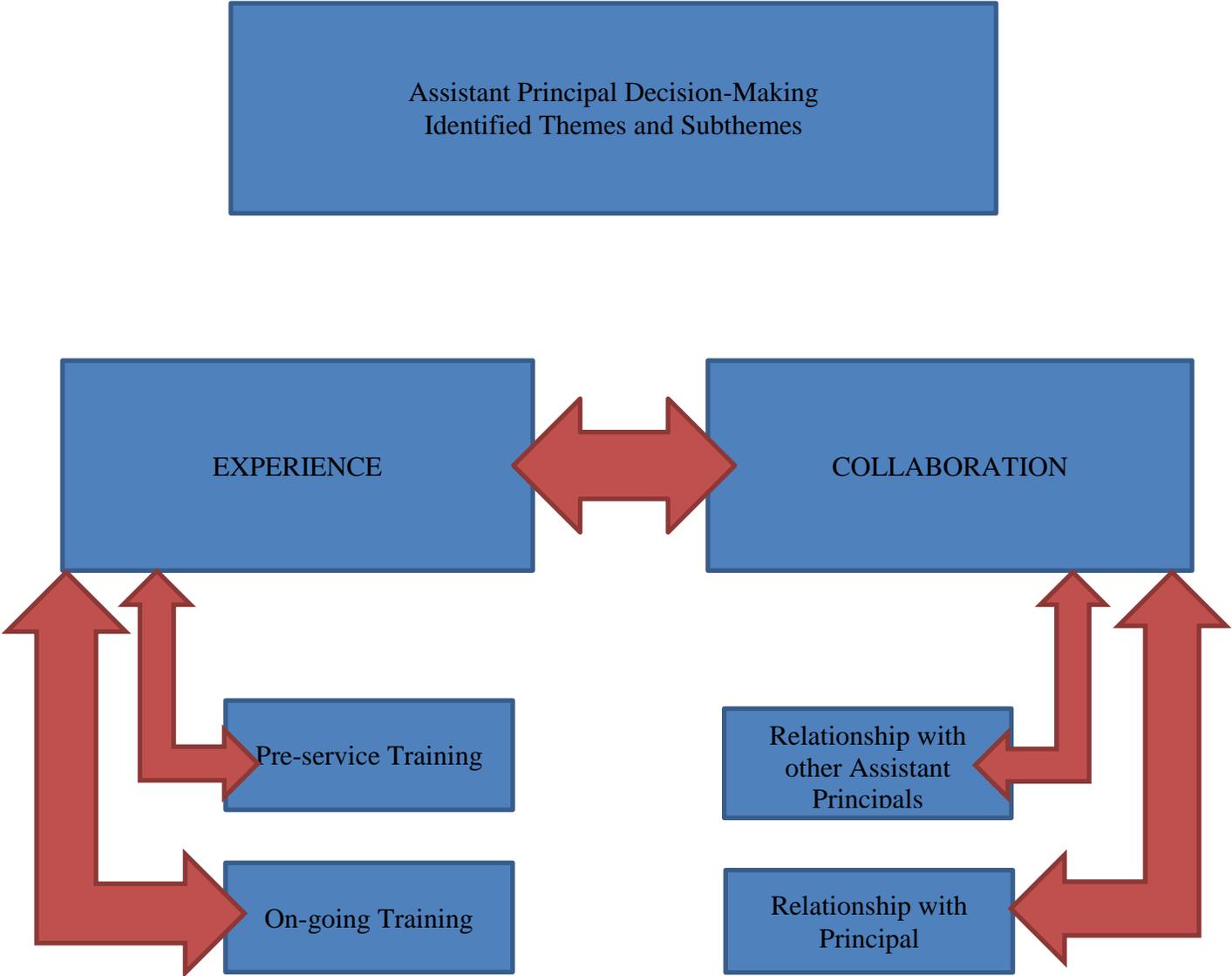
Assistant Principal Decision-Making
Identified Themes and Subthemes

EXPERIENCE

COLLABORATION

Pre-service Training

Relationship with other Assistant Principals

On-going Training

Relationship with Principal

Figure 2: Identified Themes

Findings Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the decision-making framework development of the assistant principal. This chapter will present the common resources identified by assistant principals as used when making decisions and development of their framework. The research questions and comments from the respondents will be discussed by theme and a discussion of the identified process of decision-making for assistant principals.
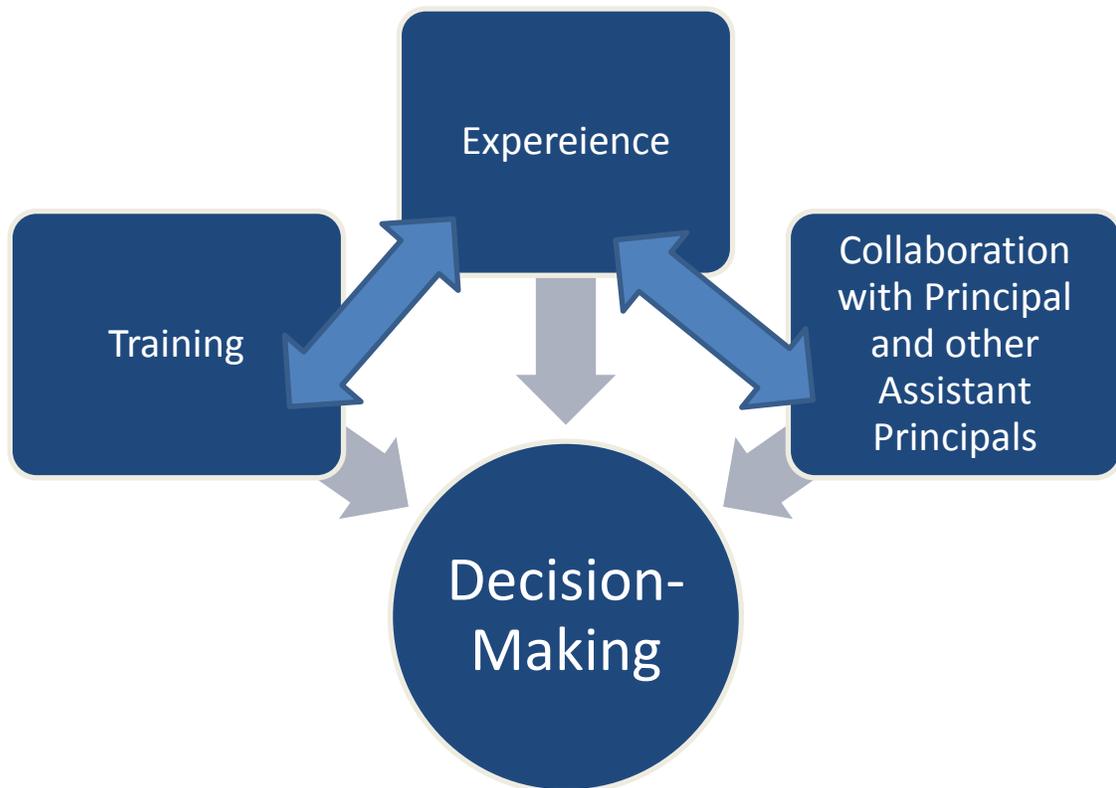

Figure 3: Decision-Making Framework

The findings presented in this study illustrate as assistant principals make decisions, they use the framework in Figure 3: Decision-Making Framework. While the type of decision will guide the process used, as assistant principals described their decision-making, they described using the resources represented here. Their training, experience, and their collaboration with either other assistant principals or their principal identified as the guiding framework around their decision-making. The type of decision often dictated the process used. For decisions that assistant principals deemed "everyday", like common discipline infractions, they use their own training or experience. However, when faced with a dilemma they had not experienced in the past, they used the experience of either another assistant principal or their principal. When decisions were more difficult, or types of decisions that may be questioned or had the potential to be questioned, assistant principals described starting with the collaboration with their principal and used that collaboration as a guiding framework. In order to tell the story of assistant principal decision-making, the identified significant statements from the assistant principals who participated in the study will be presented in quoted in bold in the following section. The exact words of the assistant principals in response to the questions asked will be used to illustrate the thoughts and beliefs of the assistant principals, in order to create a better understanding of the findings presented here.

Research Question 1: How do assistant principals describe their decision-making process?

"Nobody can prepare you for how many decision you will make, or how fast they will have to be made."

The respondents described the number and types of decisions they make, and the process by which they make those decisions. As the assistant principals described their decision-making process, two types of decisions were common themes. Decisions involving student discipline and teacher evaluations were most commonly described. When asked to describe decisions they felt were made easily, decisions regarding student discipline were described most commonly. When asked to describe challenging decisions, assistant principals most commonly described decisions that involved faculty and staff evaluations or faculty and staff reprimand.   Marshall and Hooley, (2006) write that assistant principals "encounter daily the fundamental dilemmas of the school system" (p. 3). Daresh (2004) describes the day of an assistant principal. A day filled with discipline, keeping track of textbooks, and handling parking lot and bus duty. Those decisions are rote and assistant principals can make them quickly and efficiently without much thought. Daresh (2004) goes on to describe more difficult decisions, like curricular reform and staff development. The assistant principals interviewed in this study revealed similar decisions, and described them similarly. However, as Marshall and Hooley (2006) describe, when the assistant principal's day is filled with student management, they have little time to work on curricular issues and mentoring of teachers, even though they report that decisions in these areas take more time and reflection than student management. The respondents interviewed for this study confirmed the same struggle with decision-making as they described the types of decisions they make and identified those they find easy and difficult.

Research Question 2: What resources do assistant principals rely upon to develop their decision-making process?

"There is nothing in your preparation to prepare you for all the things that come up. I think that is where common-sense comes in."

When discussing the resources used in decision-making, the overwhelming trends were the collaboration with other assistant principals (discussed later in this chapter) and the resource of experience. All the assistant principals interviewed discussed experience as a valuable resource to them in the day to day decision making. Other resources described were policy and law, student code of conduct and training, both pre-service and ongoing. Lattuca, (2012), finds that many programs do not prepare individuals for the realities of the administrative role, and that in fact his preparation program was excellent theoretically, but lacked and entry into the role with "task learning, socialization and general social reality of what assistant principals do and experience on a daily basis" (p. 152). The finding of the importance of experience in decision-making supports the conceptual and theoretical framework of this study. Both Kahneman (2002) and Haidt (2012) describe different decision making processes for different types of decisions and both authors stress that the as the decision maker makes his or her decision, he or she calls on past experience. Based on statements from the assistant principals interviewed for this study, experience from role play tasks would have beneficial during their preparation programs.

"If you have never had an experience you can learn from someone else's experience. Even if you had experience, you haven't had all the experiences. Even though my coworkers are younger and relatively new, I rely on their wisdom too."

"Wisdom is learning from your mistakes, intelligence is learning from others."

Assistant principals were asked if decision-making felt easier after some time in the position, and their responses indicated that decisions that might have once been challenging, became easier over time.

"Absolutely, some things are like second nature now. You think, I have done this before, some you didn't do so well, and you remember those too!"

"Your first year you are just learning the job. Lessons learned- especially with HR and personnel. "

"I might have felt impulsive early on in my years, but I feel I have matured and take my time to make the most informed decision now."

"I feel we sometimes have to make decisions on the fly, but I don't feel impulsive."

"I feel I make better decisions now, your perceptions change. Two kids could commit the same offense, but you have a lot to consider. We live in the grey, what is best for this situation?"

"It just comes. After a while, if you have done it long enough, you are ready."

"I think I make quicker decisions now, and will keep the district out of trouble."

"I don't feel impulsive, I have seen it all."

"Almost every discipline decision is easy now. I have learned how to read the kids, and I realize they are not all the same."

"Yes, I can say I have been there done that. When I was a new assistant principal, I would go through more thinking time."

Assistant principals indicated they feel better and more confident in their decision-making after their first year. These statements agree with the work of Sousa (2012) in

Brainwork: The Neuroscience Behind How we Lead Others, in that when individuals make decisions in error the brain will recognize that mistake in the future and direct conscious attention to the errors. This causes learning from mistakes. Assistant principals learn over time as they make decisions, and are less likely to repeat mistakes over time. Fullen and Hargreaves (2012) also report that after many years of practice and analyzing decisions, educational professionals know how to assess situations effectively, backing up the finding presented here by the respondents.

Research Question 3: What relationship does pre-service training have with decision-making?

Some of the assistant principals interviewed described activities from their pre-service training as beneficial in their current decision-making. When asked if pre-service training included decision-making practice one respondent described the following.

"I did. We didn't call it that, we called it 'in-basket'. We would either write about it or act those out. That was really good. We learned to prioritize and manage time. Everyone had the same thing, but when we came together, we all handled it different, prioritized differently."

Another described training they had.

"Yes, we studied dilemmas in my courses; I make a lot of my decisions based on that process."

Other respondents identified training relating to decision-making, but not specifically intended to be training on decision-making.

"I don't think so; we had law, and curriculum, very traditional. Decision making might have come up 'what would you do in this situation?' but there was not a course geared toward decision making."

"I don't think it was intentional, but some courses did go into decision making."

"There were a couple of courses on site based decision making and collaborative decision making, which were good, but not necessarily practical."

Others reported that they did not have any training on decision-making.

"There were no projects or assignments on decision-making."

Based on the statements from assistant principals regarding their pre-service training, it seems that those who had training in decision-making felt it was helpful in developing their decision-making experience. This finding supports the findings of Lattuca (2012) that the success of principal begins with a collection of opportunities for candidates to experience the realities of the principalship. This statement would also hold true for assistant principals based on the findings presented here. Olson (2000) found that researchers agree that training for the specific role of the assistant principal is lacking in preparation programs. Jackman (2009) also found that university programs do not create and understanding of the vital position on the assistant principal. Respondents in this study clearly confirmed that preparation for the role of assistant principal was lacking overall in their programs.

Research Question 4: How does decision-making differ when working on a team with other assistant principals versus working as a solo assistant principal?

The assistant principals working on teams answered in various ways, however the theme of collaboration was evident. It was clear from the responses that most respondents value the team process and even the two who work alone without another

assistant principal gave responses to indicate they collaborate with others. Interactions with the team were described as:

"Hallway conversations."

"Pretty much on an hourly basis."

"We do that all the time."

"Sometimes we schedule times; sometimes we have to do it on the fly."

"We have a lot of half conversations, and then we put them together."

Based on the responses, it was evident that collaboration was occurring. Other responses indicate that that collaboration is valued and an important part of the decision-making process.

"I feel it is better to work together and better decisions are made."

"I don't think we work in isolation anymore; I think I used to. We value each other's opinion and I think that is key. I think that you have to respect the people who work with and trust them as well."

"The older I get, I realize it is very dangerous water when you don't collaborate."

The two assistant principals interviewed who do not work on a team gave evidence of also seeking collaboration.

"You go to other people, 'what did you do in your school?'

One respondent made it clear that although she does not work with other assistant principals, she knows the value of collaboration.

"The biggest lesson to learn as an AP is to get other peoples input. Making sure there is collaboration and everyone has a voice."

Assistant principals were also asked about the relationship and collaboration with their building principal. Answers gave insight that while the building principal may be consulted, it may not always be for the same reasons. Some respondents indicated a value in the principal's input, while others seemed to feel that consulting the principal was a courtesy, and often only done to get his or her support, rather than his or her opinion.

"I look to him for insight, sometimes."

"He has never been unsupportive of any decision I have made."

"We meet as an administrative team, usually once a month, not always planned."

Some responses indicated that assistant principals often felt they might be bothering the principal if they consulted him, or that it was a sign of competence not to have to consult the principal.

"I used to go to him, but I have learned as I go along that I don't want to bother him."

"If I have to go to anyone, I go to the other APS. Sometimes my principal, but I don't want to bog him down."

While others seemed to indicate that the principal was there to be consulted for decisions deemed as serious or difficult.

"Absolutely, but not always depending on the level of decision."

"She is amazing getting feedback from all of us. I don't have to consult her, I think she trusts me to make decisions, but there are certain decisions I always get her feedback on."

"He has final say on some things, like student removal from a class."

These statements support the findings in Wong's (2009) study, *A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Working Relationship Between School Principals and Vice-Principals.* Wong suggested that assistant principals can build strong relationships with their principals, but to do so they must understand themselves and the nature of the superordinate/subordinate relationship. Statements from assistant principals in this study identify that assistant principals do understand the relationship. Based on the statements above, assistant principals recognize when to approach the principal for guidance and approval. If this relationship can be fostered and grown in a way to create a healthy working relationship between the two roles, assistant principals can not only gain from the experience of their principals, but also can anticipate that the relationship will lead to their principal providing more opportunities for growth and development. If the principal is aware of the importance of the relationship, he/she can focus on creating the ongoing trainings and opportunities that the assistant principal needs to develop his/her decision-making.

Conclusion

If you have never had an experience, you can learn from someone else's experience. Even if you had experience, you haven't had all the experiences. Even though my coworkers are younger and relatively new, I rely on their wisdom too. (Study Respondent, 2015)

The participants in this study participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. The researcher recorded the interviews and while reading the transcripts of the interviews, the researcher searched for themes by hand-coding the data. Comments were coded to fit into the following pre-identified categories: experience, pre-service

training, relationship with principal, relationship with other APs and types of decision

and resources, in order to sort the data into the research questions. This process

identified 120 significant statements or phrases, of which many are presented here to

illustrate trends in the comments. The statements were then sorted into the research

questions, and grouped together. Overall the participants described similar processes of

decision-making, using experience and collaboration as their guiding resources. Some of

the participants described pre-service training activities which helped them to build

experiences to rely on when decision-making. Lastly, participants indicated an

importance in collaboration with others, both their principal and other assistant principals

when available.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Introduction

This study sought to understand the decision-making process of the assistant principal. The results of this study add to the body of knowledge regarding how assistant principals make decisions and may be applied to administrative training programs. Additionally, this study demonstrated the decision-making process assistant principals use to make decisions.

The research questions included:

1. How do assistant principals describe their decision-making process?

2. What resources do assistant principals rely upon to develop their decision-making process?

3. What relationship does pre-service training have with decision-making?

4. How does decision-making differ when working on a team with other assistant principals versus working as a solo assistant principal?

This chapter will briefly review the study and discuss the theoretical and conceptual framework. This will be followed by a brief discussion of participants. Finally, there will be a discussion of the findings, followed by recommendations for future study.

Review of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the decision-making framework development of the assistant principal through a qualitative, narrative study. This qualitative study utilized a purposeful sample of six current assistant principals of secondary schools in Texas. Semi-structured interviews guided the study. A narrative approach was used to analyze and report the findings collected.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The researcher combined attributes from three theories to create a theoretical framework.   Studies by Kahneman, Kohlberg, and Fullan and Hargraves, frame the study. Kahneman's "prospect theory" is a leading theory in this study. Kahneman, who received the 2002 Nobel Prize in economics for his work on this theory, describes a person's decision-making process when an element of risk is involved. He states there are two distinct systems of thinking; the first relies of perception, intuition and emotion and is often governed by habit and the second is a controlled approach that is effortful and involves reasoning. Kahneman finds that complex judgments and preferences are called "intuitive" if they come to mind quickly and effortlessly. Judgments and intentions can be modified or overridden in a more deliberate mode of operation. (Kahnenman, 2002).

Kohlberg discusses the theory of justice in moral decision-making. Kohlberg (1981) states "justice is not a rule or a set of rules, it is a moral principle…a mode of choosing that is universal, a rule of choosing that we want all people to adopt always in all situations" (p. 39). Kohlberg (1977) tells the reader that "whether we like it or not schooling is a moral enterprise" (p. 53). Kohlberg offers a clear structure for moral

reasoning and decision-making. He offers a six stage model, in which the six stages must be moved through sequentially and the individual must master a stage before moving to the next (Kohlberg, 1977). Stage one is described as obeying a set of rules to avoid punishment; stage two begins the impression that for something to be right it must be fair and therefore rules are followed because it is in the person's best interest; stage three is starts the concern with appearance, the individual wants to appear "good" or "moral;" stage four is an acknowledgement of the social structure that exists; stage five brings the ability to evaluate the "rightness" of rules and laws and finally stage six focuses on how rules affect others in society. The concept of decisional capital is an important theory in this study. Fullen and Hargreaves (2012), describe decisional capital as involving making decisions "in complex situations on innumerable occasions with different problems and cases" (p.31). The authors find after many years of practice and analyzing that practice and case examples with others, educational professionals know how to assess situations effectively.

The works of Haidt, Bazerman and Tenbrunsel created the conceptual framework for this study. Haidt (2012) found that "Intuition comes first, strategic reason comes second" (p. xx). Haidt (2012) also presents the following theory. He states "We can believe almost anything that supports our team" (Haidt, 2012, p. 100). Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, (2011) identify "The decisions we make on the behalf of ourselves, our organizations and society at large can create great harm" (p. 37). Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) also describe two modes of decision-making. They describe one which is fast, automatic, effortless and emotional while another is slower, conscious, effortful and more logical. They find that it is common for people to make emotional

decisions with the first method; fast, automatic, effortless and emotional, when faced with an ethical dilemma.

The Participants

The participants were selected through purposeful sampling in order to help the researcher understand the decision-making framework of the assistant principal. Each of the six participants met the inclusion criteria of being a current, secondary, public school assistant principal. The years of assistant principal experience ranged from 3-17 years. An even number of male and female respondents were interviewed. All but one of the assistant principals obtained their principal certification through a traditional university degree program, and that assistant principal who did not obtain his certification through an alternative certification program at a Regional Service Center. The assistant principals worked at varying sizes of schools. The number of students on campus ranged from 485 to 2981. This was important to the study to show that while the assistant principals were in vastly different campus sizes, they faced the same types of decisions.

Discussion of Findings

This section will discuss the findings in relation to the research questions proposed by this study.

1.   How do assistant principals describe their decision-making process?

The assistant principals interviewed for this study identified steps in their decision-making process. All participants identified utilizing the resources of experience and collaboration while making decisions. Participants were given the opportunity to describe different types of decisions they made, both decisions they found challenging and decisions they found easy to make, and in all situations, they described a pattern of

using their own past experiences or collaborating with others and using their experiences

to make decisions or to help others make decisions. When assistant principals were

asked if they help other assistant principals make decisions, they also described a pattern

of calling on past experience to help others. These findings support the literature in this

study. LeTendre (2006) finds that assistant principals make decisions quickly by relying

on past experiences. Based on this finding, it would be beneficial to assistant principals

to have an ongoing opportunity to reflect on their decisions with others who make similar

decisions and grow from those experiences.

2.   What resources do assistant principals rely upon to develop their decision-making

process?

As the assistant principals described their decision-making process, they

identified the resources they use to make decisions. The assistant principals interviewed

described resources referring to law and policy and their training, both pre-service and

on-going professional development. However, the resources they identified as having the

greatest impact on their decision-making are their experience and collaboration with

others. Based on these findings, creating environments for assistant principals to share

their experiences and collaborate could become a beneficial ongoing professional

development for assistant principals.

3.   What relationship does pre-service training have with decision-making?

Of the assistant principals interviewed, some identified that they had training on

decision-making in their pre-service training. Others stated they had no training on

decision-making. In fact, many of the assistant principals responded that their training

did not have any specific training on the role of assist principal at all. Of those who did

have training relating to decision-making, it seemed they felt the training was helpful in developing experiences to draw from when making decisions. This finding agrees with the findings of Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewki (2012). They found that assistant principal training should include: prioritizing responsibilities and using time efficiently and opportunities to practice instructional leadership. Much research points to the lack of preparation for the role of the assistant principal in preparation programs. This study identifies that decision-making training is missing from some programs, and could be geared toward making decisions as an assistant principal to better prepare future leaders.

4.   How does decision-making differ when working on a team with other assistant principals versus working as a solo assistant principal?

      Two of the assistant principals interviewed work as solo assistant principals, while four of the assistant principals work on teams ranging from two to seven assistant principals. The four who work on teams described collaboration occurring on a daily basis and a great deal of using the experience of others and sharing their own decisions while making decisions, however, both of the assistant principals who do not have other assistant principals to work with described collaboration with others including their principal and other faculty and even reaching out to assistant principals in other districts. Fullen and Hargreaves (2012), describe decisional capital as involving making decisions "in complex situations on innumerable occasions with different problems and cases." (p.31). The authors find after many years of practice and analyzing that practice and case examples with others, educational professionals know how to assess situations effectively. This finding supports the finding of this study that collaboration is important

in both decision-making and in the development of the assistant principal decision-making framework.

Limitations of the Study

This study was influenced by several limitations. The study was limited to Texas schools, so therefore may not be generalized in other states. The study was limited to current assistant principals, therefore limiting the input of retired assistant principals, those who have moved into the role of principal or moved into other leadership positions. The study is further limited by the accuracy of the theoretical and conceptual framework provided by the researcher.

Additionally, the participants were from varied sized school districts. While the campus sizes varied from 3A to 6A, the study lacked input from a 1A or 2A district, which might have shown a difference in the types of decisions required or the collaboration with others. The participants were only secondary, and only one was from a middle level campus, the other five were from high school campuses. Due to these limitations, the findings might not be applicable to assistant principals in other size classifications or in an elementary setting.

Strength of the sample for this study was the equal number or male and female participants, the wide range of number of assistant principals on the teams (one to seven), the wide range of number of students each assistant principal works with (485-2981) and the fact that the study was not limited to one region in Texas.

Implications

Regardless of limitations, the study has significant implications for administrative certification programs. The reported findings of this study show the importance in

developing decision-making skills in the certification programs, and in the ongoing professional development of assistant principals on decision-making. The findings support that experience is an important resource which assistant principals use in their decision-making and the development of their decision-making framework. This study supports the findings of Lattuca (2012), that the success of an assistant principal begins with the collection of opportunities for candidates to experience the realities of the job. Lattuca states, "The longer I acted as an assistant principal the more comfortable I felt occupying the role because I knew what to expect and how to respond, where situations were not as "shocking" as the originally were" (p. 152). It is evident that assistant principals use their own experience as well as that of others when making decision.

Furthermore, findings support that the relationship with the principal is important for assistant principals in the development of their decision-making framework, as well as sharing of experience. Instructional leadership courses should consider developing courses around the decision-making of assistant principals. Research findings in this study also support the research from Madden (2008) who reported that most if not all of the duties and responsibilities of the assistant principal are assigned by the principal, and concluded that the key to a successful assistant principal lies with their principal. Marshall and Hooley (2006), go further to suggest that the assistant principal is expected to be loyal to the principal and must modify their own perspectives, ethics and morality to conform to their principals. While none of the assistant principals interviewed in this study reported feeling they must conform to their principal's perspectives, ethics or morality, it is clear that assistant principals do rely on input from the building principal.

Suggestions for Future Research

Additional studies could broaden the original study to include elementary level

assistant principals. In order to fully understand the decision-making process and the

impact of the certification program, looking at all levels of assistant principals would be

beneficial. This study brought to light the influence of the principal on the assistant

principal; it could be helpful to incorporate the perception of the principals into the study

and to further study the principal/assistant principal relationship. In addition, this study

identified types of decisions assistant principals make. An extension of that finding could

be to identify the specific resources used by assistant principals for different types of

decision-making.

Summary

This qualitative, narrative study examined the development of the decision-

making framework of the assistant principal. Six participants who are currently serving

as assistant principals in Texas secondary campuses were interviewed to explore their

decision-making framework development. This study provided insight into the decision-

making framework development of assistant principals. The study identified recurring

themes and resources used by assistant principals when making decisions, which led to

the discovery of the development of the assistant principal's decision-making framework.

In conclusion, based on the findings of this study, assistant principals utilize

training, personal experience, experience of other assistant principals, their relationship

with their principal and collaboration with other assistant principals in their decision-

making. All of the identified resources contribute to the development of the assistant

principal's decision-making framework. Educational leadership preparation programs

should consider these factors when preparing new assistant principals. With an increased focus on the importance of training and experience in the development of the decision-making framework, educational leadership preparation programs could produce assistant principals more prepared to make decisions. School districts could improve the effectiveness of their training for new assistant principals, thereby helping to develop stronger decision makers. Results of this study will be useful for superintendents and other school leaders, as well as principal preparation programs and will extend the knowledge regarding assistant principals.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol for Assistant Principals

In order to thoroughly explore the development of the decision-making process of the assistant principal, the following research questions have been developed:

1. *How do assistant principals describe their decision-making process?*
2. *What resources do assistant principals rely upon to develop their decision-making process?*
3. *What relationship does pre-service training have with decision-making?*
4. *How does decision-making differ when working on a team with other assistant principals versus working as a solo assistant principal?*

Demographics

Official Title:

_____

Type of School: Middle   High

Number of Students in your School: _____

Age: 25-35   35-45   45+

Sex: Male   Female

How many years have you been in your current position?

How many years have you been an assistant principal?

How many years were you a teacher before you became an administrator?

How many years have you been in education?

What other roles have you had as an educator?

Background:

   1. Tell me about your educational background.
      a. What did you teach?
      b. Did you have leadership roles as a teacher?
      c. If you had leadership roles as a teacher, did they help inspire you to become an assistant principal?
      d. How did you become an educational leader, specifically the assistant principal role?
      e. Were you recruited for the job, or did you interview?
      f. What made you decide to leave the classroom when you did?

   2. What resources do you feel you use when making decisions as an assistant principal?
      a. Can you give an example of a resource you use?
      b. Do you consult co-workers (other assistant principals) when making a decision?
      c. Do you feel you help other assistant principals make decisions?
      d. Do you reflect on experience with past decision-making when making current decisions?
      e. Do you refer to policy and procedures when making decisions?
      f. Do you consult with your principal when making decisions?

    g. Do you reflect on your pre-service training/courses when making decisions?

    h. Based on experience, do you feel you make decisions quicker after _ years in the same role?

    i. Do you feel you make better decisions now? Why?

    j. Do you feel you are impulsive in decision-making?

    k. If so, what type of decisions do you make impulsively?

3. Tell me about your pre-service training program. (online or traditional)

    a. Did you have any courses in which you studied decision-making?

    b. Did you have any courses in which you practiced decision-making? (internship)

    c. Can you describe any projects or assignments which focused on decision-making?

    d. Have you had professional development as an assistant principal that focuses on decision-making?

    e. How did your district prepare you as a new assistant principal to make decisions?

    f. Have you ever sought your own training on decision-making?

4. Tell me about your leadership team. (other assistant principals/principal)

    a. If you have other assistant principals on your team, do you rely on them when making decisions?

    b. Do you feel other assistant principals rely on you when making decisions?

    c. When making a group decision, can you describe the process your team uses?

    d. When making a solo decision, are you required to get your principal's approval?

    e. Is there ever a type of decision you like to make alone, without input from others? Why?

5. Describe the types of decisions you make in your role as assistant principal. (discipline, scheduling, curricular, building management/maintenance, staff management, student management, emergency, funding)

    a. What types of decisions do you make on a daily basis? Describe a typical day

    b. Describe a decision that you made recently that came easily to you? Why?

    c. Describe a decision that you make recently that was difficult to you? Why?

    d. How does a difficult decision impact you?

    e. What types of decisions do you feel comfortable making?

    f. What types of decisions are you more likely to feel uncomfortable making?

6. Describe the most challenging decision you have had to make as an assistant principal.

7. Describe the most challenging decision you have observed another assistant principal making.

APPENDIX B

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Vice President *for* Research
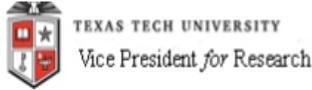
December 16, 2014

Dr. Fredric Hartmeister
Ed Psychology & Leadership
Mail Stop: 1071

Regarding: 504854 Assistant Principal Decision-Making

Dr. Fredric Hartmeister:

The Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee approved your claim for an exemption for the protocol referenced above on December 15, 2014.

Exempt research is not subject to continuing review. However, any modifications that (a) change the research in a substantial way, (b) might change the basis for exemption, or (c) might introduce any additional risk to subjects must be reported to the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) before they are implemented.

To report such changes, you must send a new claim for exemption or a proposal for expedited or full board review to the HRPP. Extension of exempt status for exempt protocols that have not changed is automatic.

The HRPP staff will send annual reminders that ask you to update the status of your research protocol. Once you have completed your research, you must inform the HRPP office by responding to the annual reminder so that the protocol file can be closed.

Sincerely,

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
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APPENDIX C
Melissa Fields
PO BOX 1716
Marble Falls, TX 78654

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Melissa Fields, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the College of Education at Texas Tech University. I am conducting this research to fulfill my dissertation requirements. This study will be a qualitative, narrative analysis which will be beneficial current and future school leaders.

The purpose of the study is to collect information on the development of the decision-making framework of the assistant principal. I hope to understand how assistant principals make decisions and what resources they use as they develop their decision-making framework. I will collect data through scheduled interviews with current assistant principals.

You are invited to act as a potential participant in the study. Your participation is voluntary and would take approximately (1) hour in the initial face to face interview and (30) minutes for a follow up phone interview, if needed. You may quit the interview process at any time should you become uncomfortable answering questions. After hearing from you through email or phone call of your willingness to participate in the study, I will contact you with additional participation information. To protect your privacy, personally identifying information will be masked. Neither your name nor your organization's name will be identified in any way. Pseudonyms will be used to keep collected data confidential.

Your professional experience could greatly contribute to the study and influence the future training and development of assistant principals and add to the limited body of knowledge on assistant principals.

My research is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Fred Hartmeister, Professor of Education and Law, and Chair of the Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership at Texas Tech University. No personally identifiable information will be connected to your participation in this research study.

Thank you for considering participating in my research study.

Melissa Fields, Doctoral Candidate, Texas Tech University
Email: Melissa.fields@ttu.edu
Phone: 830.798.3520
Human Research and Protection Email: hrpp@ttu.edu