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Factors That Influence the Career Stability of Assistant Principals

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ABSTRACT

The Factors That Influence the Career Stability of Assistant Principals

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In light of potential shortages of administrators in public education, this study was designed to investigate factors that could influence assistant principals to remain in their current positions as assistant principals or to aspire to principalships. The following factors were examined to determine whether current assistant principals felt they were significant in their career decision-making: administrative process, mentoring experience, role conflict, and role ambiguity.

The survey study asked a sample (n=612) of assistant principals (N=9777) 21 questions on the *Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey*. The data were analyzed in correlation with the participants' career plans. Participation in a mentoring program was highly significant for those assistant principals who wish to remain assistants or move on to principalships. Participation in a team-like administrative process was also significant as well as age, years in education, and years as an administrator. Sex, role conflict, and role ambiguity were not significant as general factors, but three individual questions related to role conflict demonstrated significance.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family who has supported me through this long

process: my husband, John; my son, Michael; and my daughter, Katherine.

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As anyone who has done this process knows, it cannot be accomplished alone. While my name is on the document, the contributions of many other people have made this work possible.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The American public elementary/secondary education system is facing critical

shortages of teachers and administrators over the next several years. The U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics noted that 40% of the nation's principals are close to retirement age

(Hintz, 2002), thus creating a demand for new applicants to fill administrative positions.

As early as 1998, school districts reported difficulties with filling administrative positions

in elementary and secondary schools (Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001). Richard Riley,

U.S. Education Secretary, spoke of this shortage when he addressed Columbia

University's Teachers College and called for federal expenditures to train leaders for

administrative openings (Associated Press, 2000).

Historically, applicants for principalships have come from the assistant principals'

ranks, but today's assistants are the same age as principals and are also ready to retire.

While 80% of assistant principals in 1970 aspired to the principalship (Austin & Brown,

1970), in 1991 50% of assistant principals were career stable by choice (Auclair, 1991;

Forcella, 1991); therefore, the pool of qualified candidates for school administration has

been significantly reduced. This shortage calls for a closer look at the job of assistant

principal since it has traditionally been considered a "stepping stone" for individuals who

wish to become principals (Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1995). Findings over the last

decade indicate that more assistant principals consider themselves career stable (Scoggins

& Bishop, 1993). In order to fill the upcoming vacancies in secondary administration, it

will be necessary to find ways to keep assistant principal positions occupied by qualified

individuals, at least some of whom aspire to climb the career ladder. Therefore, a study

to determine those factors that influence assistant principal career decisions would be helpful to school districts that wish to be proactive in solving this problem. The literature points to several factors that might influence career decisions: participation in a team, role ambiguity, role conflict, and participation in a mentoring program of some sort.

History of the Changing Role of Principals

Over the last few decades, much research has been done on the changing role of the principal (Frazier, 2002; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Hallinger, 1992; Wells, Scollay, & Rinehart, 1999). A historical look at the principalship shows that the position has evolved already through five stages: only one teacher in the school, head teacher, teaching principal, school principal, and supervising principal. It is now entering a sixth stage, designated as *principal as change agent* (Malone & Cadell, 2000). The one-room schoolhouse (one teacher) dated back to the early 1800s (Drue, 1981). By 1857 there was discussion of the role of a teaching principal in a high school (Drue; Beck & Murphy, 1992). The 1857 principal's job description dealt mostly with instruction and instructional techniques and the trend continued until the 1950s (Drue). During the 1950s and 1960s principals became managers, concerned more with the business of running a school than with the curricular issues that had occupied them before (Beck & Murphy; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993).

The last part of the twentieth century brought about significant changes for education in general, and principals in particular, that made administrative jobs different and more challenging. Federal and state legislation, particularly in the area of special education, state accreditation standards, site-based management and decision-making trends all increased the principal's work load (Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998). The

principal is now expected to make changes in the way the school provides instruction

using new methods of communication and negotiation with staff, parents, community and

government agencies (Portin et al.). Principals have gone from being lead teachers to

managers, and now the trend is moving back toward being instructional leaders.

Effective schools research from the last 20 years has pointed to instructional

leadership of the principal as one of the critical factors in successful schools (Boyer,

1983; Lezotte, 1984; NASSP, 2001; Portin et al., 1998). Essentially every description of

effective schools begins with a discussion about strong instructional leadership from the

principal (Hurley, 1992; Lawler, 1986; Lezotte; Michel, 1996; Waxman, 1999). This

emphasis on curricular leadership, added to the responsibilities of managing a school,

along with the increased focus on accountability in the form of meticulous record

keeping, has created a job that is beyond the ability of any one person to perform

(Mendez, 1987). Miller and Lieberman (1982) suggested that a principal will

periodically serve as "omniscient overseer," "sifter and sorter of knowledge," "pace setter and

routinizer," "referee," "linker and broker," "translator and transformer," "paper pusher, accountant

and clerk," "educational leader," and "scapegoat" (pp. 364-366).

The principal needs help in handling the overwhelming number of tasks on that

job description (Connell, 2000). Fortunately, most principals of secondary schools of

600 or more students have help from an assistant principal who does whatever duties are

assigned by that principal (Austin & Brown, 1970; Panyako & Rorie, 1987; Reed &

Himmler, 1985; Shockley & Smith, 1981). Because these individuals work together, the

changing role of the principal necessarily means that the role of the assistant principal is

changing also (Clemons, 1989).

Administrative Teams

One of the factors relating to the assistant principal's job is the assistant's perception of being part of a team. Research in the business field has long held that teams outperform individuals in creating effective and efficient production and even help bring about change (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Society in general, and business in particular, is being reorganized to accommodate cooperative groups (teams) that take advantage of collective knowledge, skills and decision-making to increase organizational productivity (Lawler, 1986). Katzenback and Smith further stated that real teams should be the basic unit of function in every organization including schools. They also pointed to the importance of teams whenever real change is being made. This would certainly imply a need for assistant principals to be part of an educational administrative team in order to assist the principal in dealing with all kinds of changes, those that are externally mandated and those that are creative internal changes. The shortages of applicants for administrative jobs also indicate a need for administrative team study (Christensen, 2002).

Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelly, and McCleary (1988) studied school administrative teams in particular and found that they could be very effective in helping principals and assistant principals deal with changing roles and responsibilities. Whether the teams operated formally or informally, the specificity of role assignments and accountability as well as shared decision-making were positive factors in the efficient operation of the schools. In some schools, the assistant principal is not just the traditional disciplinarian doing most of the managerial tasks, but is an active force in the curricular life of the school. This makes the assistant more a team member with the principal rather

than a subordinate to the principal (Pellicer et al.). When a school administration operates as a team, both the principal and assistant principal have opportunities to exhibit leadership in addition to management skills (Hosack, 1994; Michel, 1996). Michel concluded in his study of Connecticut schools that good schools require improved leadership from both the principal and assistant principal.

Effective schools research has supported the notion that principals and assistant principals can work together as a team to maximize school effectiveness (Hurley, 1992; Lawler, 1986; Lezotte, 1984; Michel, 1996; Waxman, 1999). Mendez (1987) proposed that schools not only have a principal and one assistant principal (or more), but that schools also need administrative assistants to handle supervision, facilities management, minor discipline and activity scheduling. Smith and Ellett (2000) emphasized the idea of an administrative team by redefining the metaphor for the school administrator from the musical image of an orchestra conductor to the image of a small jazz combo where each member has clear, specific responsibilities and yet together the members create a synchronous whole.

<div align="center">Role Ambiguity</div>

Another of the aspects of the assistant principals' job that has been discussed in the literature is the ambiguity of the actual tasks to be performed, expectations, and evaluation (Marshall, 1992). As with administrative teams, the business world has been studying the effects of role ambiguity for several decades. Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) defined role ambiguity as one or more unclear roles that face the "role incumbent" in terms of the actual tasks or the evaluation of those tasks. The lack of clarity may be due to communication gaps. The literature describes several aspects of

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role ambiguity that would be applicable in business or education: goal/expectation ambiguity, process ambiguity, priority ambiguity and behavior ambiguity (Bauer & Simmons, 2000). The first aspect involves actual tasks to be performed and whether those tasks are clearly defined. Process deals with how the tasks are to be organized and carried out. Priority means the level of importance of tasks and in what order tasks should be done. Finally, behavior refers to expected overt behavioral manifestations in various situations. Ambiguity in these areas eventually prompts concern or stress, particularly when evaluation criteria are unclear. The stress, in turn, decreases effectiveness (Davis, 1998; Fried, Ben-David, Tiegs, Avital, &Yeverechyahu, 1998; Harris, 1998).

Several studies have reported the relationship between role ambiguity, the tension resulting from role ambiguity, and job performance (Bauer & Simmons, 2000; Fried et al., 1998; Johnson, LaFrance, Meyer, Speyer, & Cox, 1998; Netemeyer, Johnston, & Burton, 1990). When Scoggins and Bishop reviewed the education literature on the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals in 1993, they found no conclusive evidence that there was a consistent job description for administrators. They pointed out that there are a number of duties assistant principals have in common such as discipline, supervision and attendance; however, those duties varied significantly in the amount of time the assistant principal spent with a particular task and the level of authority allotted to the assistant in that arena. The scope of tasks assigned varied from state to state, district to district, school to school, and even within a school (Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). Hartzell et al. (1995) supported the idea that there is little consistency in what an assistant principal does. Marshall and Greenfield (1987) described the assistant principal variously

as a drill sergeant, bully, mother superior, and empathizer. All of this variance and ambiguity in what an assistant principal should be doing is contrary to what assistants say brings them job satisfaction (Marshall, 1993).

It is interesting to note, though, that most principals do not feel that being an assistant principal trained them for their current job, because principals are focused more on instructional leadership while assistants are assigned primarily managerial tasks (Kelly, 1987). Assistant principals also feel that they spend so much time on discipline and attendance despite national trends toward more sharing of instructional leadership, that they are essentially unprepared in the areas of curriculum and instruction (Moegling, 2000). This creates a sense of ambiguity because an assistant principal who aspires to become a principal may assume that being an assistant will provide training and experience for future jobs but, in fact, it may not. The potential gap between the experiences of principals and assistant principals makes the transition a challenging one.

<div align="center">Role Conflict</div>

Role conflict, which is nearly always studied in conjunction with role ambiguity (Bauer & Simmons, 2000), is defined by Van Sell, Brief, and Schuler (1981, p. 44) as the "incongruity of the expectations associated with a role." Those expectations may come from the same source; the building principal might expect that an assistant be constantly patrolling the building and simultaneously maintain reports and paperwork in a timely manner. The expectations may come from different sources where the principal expects one set of behaviors and teachers expect another. Expectations from assistant principals themselves may vary radically from the realities of the job. While most assistant principals wish to provide support for students in achieving success, the assistant's

disciplinarian role frequently creates conflict. Assistant principals sometimes have a sense that they are stymied in actually helping students because they are forced to be only rule enforcers (Hartzell et al., 1995). Conflict may also arise when the everyday job demands interfere with performing the duties that bring about the most professional and personal satisfaction (Marshall, 1992). Finally, conflict occurs when the assistant principal cannot complete all of the assigned duties adequately (Marshall).

When role conflict occurs in conjunction with role ambiguity, there is an increase in stress that affects job performance (Bauer & Simmons, 2000; Fried et al., 1998; Netemeyer et al., 1990). While some ambiguity or some conflict alone may be tolerable or even desirable to challenge the individual to use creative problem-solving skills, too much of either, or both simultaneously, are detrimental to desired outcomes (Bauer & Simmons, 2000; Fried et al., 1998). Role conflict experienced by assistant principals might also play a part in whether or not they might be prepared to become a principal or even desire to do so.

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

Besides team participation, role ambiguity and role conflict, the issue of mentoring appears often in the literature in conjunction with the research related to career transition for assistant principals. Actual training for the assistant principalship does not exist (Marshall, 1992). Most states do not even mention assistant principals in their certification statutes and have no criteria listed separately for that position. All university administrative courses and programs are designed to train potential candidates for the principalship and rarely discuss the assistant principal (Hartzell et al., 1995; Marshall, 1992). Once an individual has become an assistant principal from which some on-the-job

training might occur, most assistants discover that the jobs overlap very little and provide minimal training for the next level. There is a significant gap between the research and practice in education administration (Hartzell et al., 1995). Monsour (1998) proposed that "mentoring helps to close the gap between preservice training and the actualities of administration" (p. 96).

Mentoring has been applauded as a helpful tool for assistant principals and principals in learning their jobs, preparing for future jobs, and obtaining future jobs (Anderson; Harris, 1998; Marshall, 1990; Stavrakos-Theodorou; Winn). New administrators themselves feel strongly that participation in a mentoring program was critical to their success in obtaining an administrative position (Anderson, 1994; Stavrakos-Theodorou, 1993; Winn, 1993). Since there is a critical lack of training for administrative jobs, mentoring programs have provided at least some structure for helping new administrators gain knowledge and experience.

<center>Problem Statement</center>

Retaining good assistant principals and encouraging new principals are critical tasks for the education community in the not-so-distant future. This challenge requires a study of the assistant principalship and the factors related to career stability. Marshall (1990, 1992) defined six different categories of orientation to the assistant principalship. First is the upwardly mobile assistant principal who is active in organizations, is loyal to superiors, has a mentor, and actively aspires to the principalship. Next is the career assistant principal who has established a positive, healthy niche and is proud of his or her position. The "plateaued" assistant principal wants to advance but because of a lack of relationship skills or a mentor has no opportunity to advance. Another orientation is the

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"shafted" assistant principal who mostly seems to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and has limited opportunities. Next is the assistant who considers leaving for opportunities in fields other than education. Finally, there is the downwardly mobile administrator who may be moving voluntarily or involuntarily. Because respondents are unlikely to categorize themselves as downwardly mobile or shafted, for the purposes of this study career stability will be divided into four categories: assistant principals planning to move into a higher level of administration, assistant principals planning to remain as an assistant, assistant principals who plan to leave administration but remain in education, and those who wish to leave education altogether.

Large pools of candidates in the first two categories are necessary for school districts to be able to fill administrative jobs with qualified individuals. It would benefit school districts to find out how to create those pools so that the future of their school system is founded on a solid bed of leadership. It appears that in order for schools to survive in the next century, a strong group of candidates for principals' jobs is needed, as well as individuals who are able to work as team members in assistant principals' jobs. Since the assistant principalship is the key training ground for principals (Marshall, 1990), and little research has been conducted concerning the assistants' job (Chelikten, 1998; Harris, 1998; Hartzel et al., 1995; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Kohl, 1992; Weller & Weller, 2002), a study of the factors that influence career decisions of assistant principals would provide some much-needed information. In fact, a review of 756 articles published in the education professional literature between 1993 and 1999, only eight articles (1%) dealt with the assistanceship (Kaplan & Owings). There is also some suggestion in the literature that the assistant principalship should be considered as

something more than a transitional job (Venditti, 2002). This supports the need for study

and possible change in the field of education administration. The problem, then, is how

to structure the experiences of potential administrators in order to ensure the future

leadership of our schools.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

1. Is there a correlation between an assistant principal's perception of his/her
   participation in an administrative team and his/her career stability?

2. Is there a correlation between role ambiguity and the career stability of
   assistant principals?

3. Is there a correlation between role conflict and the career stability of assistant
   principals?

4. Is there a correlation between an assistant principal's participation in a mentor
   program and his/her career stability?

5. Are there additional factors that influence an assistant principal's career
   stability?

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

Hurley (1992) interviewed teachers with the perceived leadership attributes to

become administrators. The majority of those teachers had no desire to pursue a

principalship because of a variety of factors including the enormity of the job; the

diversity of the tasks, many of which were not curricular- or student-centered; and the

lack of collegiality. "The place of assistant principals in their career paths or in the

school's social system has been ignored, for the most part" (Peterson, Marshall, & Grier,

1987, p. 32); therefore, study of the assistant principalship would help establish the

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conditions under which school boards can attract highly qualified individuals to aspire to this entry level administrative job. The study would also help school boards structure the assistant principal's job with clear expectations and the opportunity to work collaboratively with principals in leadership capacities. It may also clarify the importance of mentoring programs in attracting, training, and retaining skilled assistant principals.

Operational Definitions

1. Participation on an administrative team will be defined by responses on the *Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey*.

2. Role Ambiguity will be defined by responses to the *Rizzo, House, Lirtzman Role Ambiguity Scale*.

3. Role Conflict will be defined by responses to the *Rizzo, House, Lirtzman Role Conflict Scale*.

4. Participation in a mentor program will be defined by responses on the *Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey*.

5. Career stability will be defined by responses on the *Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey*.

Methods

This was a study conducted as a survey of current assistant principals in the United States. Subjects were chosen randomly from the membership roles of NASSP. The assistant principals were mailed the *Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey* consisting in part of the *Rizzo, House, Lirtzman Role Ambiguity Scale* and the *Rizzo, House, Lirtzman Role Conflict Scale*. These questions were designed with Likert Scale

responses. The rest of the survey consisted of several multiple-choice items and an open-ended question. The responses on these three scales were correlated to the subjects' responses to an introductory section that asked about career plans and demographic information in order to determine whether or not there is a correlation between any of the factors on the scales and what the respondents' career plans are.

Limitations

A limitation to this study would be the number of responses returned from the mailing to a sample of assistant principals nationwide. Questionnaires were sent to assistants across the country in a variety of secondary school sizes and locations. The sample was limited, however, to assistant principals who are members of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Another limitation was the quantitative nature of the questionnaire, which does not allow for elaboration on items. Some explanation, in many cases, might open up new variables or provide additional insight into existing variables. Also, some factors were determined by one question and there was no opportunity for elaboration. An additional limitation is that the responses were only the respondents' perceptions of their situation and not necessarily the factual representation. This means that, while administrators make their decisions based on those perceptions, it is difficult to provide assistance or remediation for a situation that is merely perception.

Finally, only the Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict Scales have been subjected to rigorous testing over a number of years to provide reliability and validity. The researcher-constructed portion of the questionnaire was field tested for readability purposes and a Cronbach's Correlation Alpha score was determined for reliability.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter will provide a literature review as a basis for this study of the

assistant principalship and factors that influence career stability among administrators.

Research in these areas began to appear in the 1970s and has continued for the last 30

years.

Introduction

Recent literature (Portin et al., 1998; Sergiovanni, 1995; Waxman, 1999) supports

the traditional literature (Boyer, 1983; Lezotte, 1984) that labels the instructional

leadership of a principal as one of the key elements in an effective school. This

philosophy supports the view that the role of the principal should be focused on

curriculum and instruction and not management of day-to-day details. The role of the

principal has changed in recent years to meet that goal (Goodwin, 2002); however, in

many cases the management tasks that remained the purview of the principal causing the

job to become overwhelming (Mendez, 1987).

> Dwindling resources, burgeoning paperwork, crumbling facilities, increasing
>
> public criticisms and expectations, growing numbers of students with special
>
> needs, and increasing demands by teachers and parents to participate in decision
>
> making pose serious challenges to principals at virtually all levels and in nearly
>
> every area of the country (Davis, 1998, p. 58).

This shift in emphasis has implications for the role of the assistant principal

(Clemons, 1989). The role of the assistant principal is defined by the supervising

principal (Kelly, 1987; Manatt, 1989; Wells, Scollay, & Rinehart, 1999). Assistants do whatever tasks are assigned to them by their principal (Kelly, 1987; Marshall, 1990). This means that as the role of the principal changes to adjust to the demands of special education legislation, curriculum and instruction issues, and a growing need to participate in the political world (Portin et al., 1998), assistant principals must generally take over the management of daily operations almost entirely (Mendez, 1987). If an assistant intends to remain an assistant for the rest of his career, this arrangement works well. If the assistant wishes to use his position as a "stepping stone" to a principalship, this arrangement is a problem because the assistant is receiving little or no training toward that end (Kelly, 1987; Wells et al., 1999).

The next piece of this problem is the current and ever-increasing shortage of potential administrators (Associated Press, 2000; Batenhorst, 2002; Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001). Cushing, Kerrins, and Johnstone (2003) pointed out that the difficulty is not that there are not the number of individuals becoming credentialed, it is the number who are applying for principal jobs. Their survey of Human Resources Directors and Superintendents across the state of California revealed several reasons for the reluctance of qualified individuals to move into the assistanceship on their way to a principal's position: low pay, high job stress, and long hours. A national survey done jointly for the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Elementary School Principals by the Educational Research Service (1998) showed that 37% of acting principals were over 50 years of age, the number of principal and assistant principal positions will continue to

increase until at least 2005, and shortages are being felt in all areas, types, and locations of schools.

These two factors, the changing nature of administrative roles and shortages of applicants, presage a crisis in education that needs to be addressed. One response to that crisis would be to examine the assistant principalship and develop ways to strengthen that position so that it better prepares individuals to become principals.

History of the Changing Role of Principals

The shortage of applicants for all administrative jobs in schools (Olson, 1999; Portin et al., 1998; Waxman, 1999) has prompted a number of studies into the principalship, its characteristics, its description, its changing state, and its future. Although the assistant principalship is inextricably enmeshed with the principalship because it is defined by those in the principalship, little has been done to study it separately. In order to discover what is happening today with the assistanceship, it is imperative to examine the principalship to determine whether shortages are due to the nature of the principalship, the pool of applicants, the preparation structure for administrators, or some other entity.

Goodwin (2002) indicated that there are sufficient numbers of teachers being trained as administrators, but they are not applying for administrative jobs. Cushing, Kerrins, and Johnstone (2003) studied the phenomenon in California and discovered that enough administrative credentials were awarded between 1998 and 2000 to supply 72% of the administrative jobs in the state. Yet California is experiencing a shortage of applicants from which to choose. Hurley (1992) interviewed 25 teachers with potential leadership ability and only five said that they would consider becoming an administrator

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unless the job changed considerably. That would indicate that the nature of the principalship or the preparation of administrators is the area to scrutinize.

While schools have existed in this country since the first settlers arrived from Europe and, indeed, the first public high school was chartered in Boston in 1821 (Drue, 1981), public high schools with administrators called principals were not the norm until around the turn of the twentieth century (Fenske, 1995). Fenske's study of 100 years of writings by high school principals provides a look at changing views of the role of the American high school. In 1890, the starting point of his study, principals were regarded as "teachers with administrative responsibilities" (Beck & Murphy, 1992, p. 393). They were upholders of the prevailing mores and by 1920 were viewed as scientific managers with a spiritual imperative (Beck & Murphy). During the latter half of the nineteenth century principals taught classes, administered the school, served as liaison between the school and community as well as between the school and the board of education (Drue, 1981).

Continuing to track the principalship throughout the twentieth century, Beck and Murphy (1992) found that very quickly after the 1920s, the religious overtones in job descriptions for principals disappear completely. Within the historical context of the depression and industrialization, the principal's job began to acquire the language of industry. Principals became executives (Beck & Murphy) and their jobs were discussed in terms of supervision of students (Drue, 1981). That value-free philosophy of school management continued through the 1940s and 50s, and principals were more concerned with the business of school than the instructional leadership of faculty and staff (Beck & Murphy). The Russian launch of the Sputnik satellite and the resulting panic in the

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American school system about poor science and math instruction forced the federal government to begin to take an active role in dictating the academic programs taught in schools. Principals, once again, in the 1960s and 70s became instructional leaders, but they were accountable now to federal, state, and local entities through ever-increasing mounds of paperwork (Beck & Murphy).

Principals became responsible for federal programs, laws for special education, as well as bilingual education, and were commissioned to become instruments of school improvement and change (Hallinger, 1992). The school administrator became a change agent (Thomson, 1990) responsible to outside entities not centered in the local community (Hallinger). The 1980s further confirmed the role of instructional leader and change agent with the arrival of effective schools research (Hallinger). The principal was held to be the key figure in school improvement and curricular reform. Principals retained all of their management responsibilities with no additional resources or assistance. Today's principals are sometimes viewed as transformational leaders who ideally initiate change and become "leaders of leaders" (Hallinger, p. 41), sharing the leadership role with many others including assistants, department chairs, and community members. The principal is still the key to effective schools, but the responsibilities are assigned to a number of people who operate individually but contribute to an administrative team.

Exactly how the role of the principal has changed in the last 20 years was studied by the Minister of Education of Prince Edward County in Canada (2000). The study reported that principals felt that they spent too much time on paperwork, meetings, conflict resolution, and management issues and not enough time on staff development educational planning, evaluation, and school improvement planning. Principals spend

more time now on technology, paperwork, building management, and meetings than they did five years ago. Principals also spend an average of 54.6 hours a week at their administrative jobs (75% of the principals also had a teaching assignment) and spend over 99.6 hours a year during vacations and holidays doing administrative duties. In addition, the study showed that the role of the assistant principal was not defined by law and varied from school to school.

A similar study in Washington in 1996 confirmed that principals are expected to work with more stake-holders, must be knowledgeable about complex legislation, are assigned new and unfamiliar roles, must deal with conflicting expectations from the community, and are working more hours than five years ago (Portin et al., 1998). The findings of this study must be taken seriously:

> Principals are approaching the limits of the amount of time they can dedicate to the job. Legislators, school boards, and district administrators who are proposing additional changes that will affect the school and the principal's role should realize that many principals are severely limited in their capacity to take on additional duties (Portin et al., 1998, p. 1).

Complexity is also a focus of one of the few studies on the assistant principalship which was done by Pellicer, Anderson, Keefer, Keller, and McCleary (1988) comparing the duties of assistant principals in 1987 and in 1965. Only one of the original 59 duties came off the list in 1987 (field trips), but seven more were added (instructional methods, instructional software, computer services, staff inservice, graduation activities, teacher incentives/motivation, and special education). All of the duties added require training or time to carry out, meaning that the workload has increased significantly. With this

increase in assignments comes a perceived decrease in discretion in carrying out duties, so that responsibility is diminished (Pellicer et al., 1988). Williams (1995) confirmed that the assistant principal's role has dramatically changed since the 1920s, when the assignment was more clerical and supervisory.

The assistant principalship "has traditionally been regarded as an entry-level administrative position" (Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991, p. 60) and, as such, an extension of the principalship. It is viewed as an apprenticeship for the principalship (Moegling, 2000). Assistants take care of jobs assigned to them by principals, but often they have very little complete responsibility on their own. Principals tend to retain ultimate responsibility for every aspect of the school (Pellicer & Stephenson). Therefore, as the role of the principal has changed, so too has the role of the assistant principal (Clemons, 1989).

Pellicer and Stevenson's study (1991) concluded that "as schools attempt to respond to a more diverse student population and meet the learning needs of more students, assistant principals may well assume an increasingly important role in the functioning principalship" (p. 59-60). They may be more likely to stay in the assistant's job and share responsibilities than to move up to the principal's job whether by necessity or by choice. In order to encourage stability among administrators, the tasks must change from the situation described by Koru (1993), who concluded that "the work of the assistant principal centers on routine clerical tasks, custodial duties, and discipline. Assistant principals are constantly in a reactive mode, juggling the tasks that need to be done. Their activities are characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation" (p. 70). Assistants may need to move from their primary traditional role of disciplinarian to a

more diversified job description that includes instructional leadership, ethical model, and community relations agent (Calabrese, 1991; Frazier, 2002).

Administrative Teams

Seeking school principals. Qualifications: Must be faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound; must communicate in multiple languages. Ability to be in more than one place simultaneously, to perform miracles and to walk on water highly desirable. Blue uniform with tights and cape furnished by employer (Cushing et al., 2003, p. 28).

There is significant research that supports the idea that the job of principal has become so overwhelming that a new concept of educational leadership is necessary in order for all tasks to be completed. Most researchers emphasize that it is becoming imperative to look at the leadership of a school as an administrative team rather than a hierarchy (The Assistant Principals Commission, 1980; Calabrese, 1991; Michel, 1996; Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991; Williams, 1995). The Assistant Principals Commission report in 1980 recognized that assistant principals must be part of an administrative team in order to be effective in their job. This is difficult, however, because in education like business, the principal (or CEO) retains ultimate responsibility for what takes place in the school or business, but, unlike business, assistants are not hired with specific job descriptions or areas of expertise so that the bulk of responsibility for some areas falls to the assistant. This means that there is no clearly defined structure for responsibility and a "team" does not really exist. "Team management is an important [aspect] of the restructuring of schools of the future" (Michel, 1996, p. 9), but hiring is not being done in such a way as to support the concept of an administrative team.

Hiring practices that define specific roles for administrators includes the suggestion that management and instructional leadership are separate jobs and should be handled by different people (Cushing et al., 2003; "Effective leadership cited," 2001; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Rallis & Highsmith, 1986; Richardson, Flanigan, Prickett, & Short, 1991), rather than expecting one person to do everything with an assistant or two to help. Mendez (1987) even suggested that the principal have a managerial staff that operates as a team to take care of the day-to-day business of the school. Kaplan and Owings (1999) promoted the concept of a principal with assistant principals as a leadership team, with management staff under the assistant principals to manage the daily operation of the school. LaRose (1987) added that when principals and assistants have skills that complement each other, the overall leadership becomes stronger.

One of the problems in role definition for the principal and assistant principal is that many times they do the same jobs (Marshall, 1992), and no clear responsibility is delineated. A 1998 study by Chelikten reported that the assistant principals interviewed felt that their written job descriptions were strictly "symbolic." On the other hand, some schools operate with the principal taking full responsibility for the instructional leadership and the assistant(s) handling the management responsibilities so that the assistant never has an opportunity to have training as a principal. Even in that situation, the principal is generally responsible for everything and assistants "lack the position, power, and status of the principal and remain dependent on the principal" (Marshall, 1992, p. 3). A study of assistant principals in Medicine Hat, Canada, indicated that none of the administrators studied felt that they had complete autonomy in decision-making

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(Kelly, 1987). This creates overlaps and perhaps gaps and is implicitly inefficient in providing leadership and management for a school.

Businesses have long recognized the advantage of using teams to produce the most efficient and effective products, and education is beginning to adopt the same philosophy (Greer & Short, 1990). Research in the business sector shows that "collective knowledge [,] skills, and creative energy of groups of individuals enhances [sic] the quality and quantity of output in organizations" (Richardson et al., 1991, p.6). Quite simply, "teams outperform individuals acting alone" (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 9). This has two impacts on education: 1) best practice would indicate that education could benefit from the lessons learned in industry about how to maximize the abilities of a group of individuals by having them work as a team, 2) it affects the way we teach students because they need to learn to work in cooperative groups and develop collaborative skills (Richardson et al.).

The goal of restructuring administrative teams to include shared decision-making and job descriptions that delineate responsibilities more clearly is not only to increase effectiveness but also to create a sense of shared ownership for the success of the school (Richardson et al., 1991). "The same team dynamics that promote performance also support learning and behavioral change" (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 16). That truism is supported by examples in business. General Electric, Ford, and Motorola all achieved success in the last decade by using teams. There are examples in the nonbusiness world also: the Bronx Educational Services team created a nationally recognized adult literacy program, and a team of citizens in Harlem provided Little League opportunities for children (Katzenbach & Smith).

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Today's demands for high performance indicate a need for new ways to manage and lead organizations in general and schools in particular. The mandates of the federal legislation entitled *No Child Left Behind* insist on major changes in the way schools teach, manage learning, monitor learning, and structure the learning environment, further supporting the use of administrative teams to bring about those changes. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) insisted that teams facilitate major change because they provide mutual support and accountability, expect everyone to contribute, encourage people to work together for continuous improvement, allow people to buy into purpose and learning, and encourage personal growth. A school that is led by shared instructional leadership encourages greater success for teachers and students and a greater sense of effectiveness for administrators. It also prepares assistants for a later principalship (Kaplan & Owings, 1999).

New assistant principals comment on how several aspects of their jobs contribute to the satisfaction they derive from what they do. Notably, their sense of belonging to a team is frequently mentioned as being helpful in learning about and doing their job. Because they are often unprepared for their new job, being a team member increases opportunities to ask for and receive help as well as providing support during a time of intense learning. Team membership allows for the development of leadership skills in addition to management skills, a process which, in turn, promotes visionary leadership and synergy (Hartzell et al., 1995).

<center>Role Ambiguity</center>

The literature on assistant principals relies heavily on discussion of the "role" this administrator fulfills in a school. The organization (school) can be linked with the

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individual (assistant principal) through the framework of role theory (Schuler, Aldag, & Brief, 1977). Role theory defines role as "the set of prescriptions defining what behavior of a position member should be" (Biddle & Thomas, 1966, p. 29). Roles have several functions: serving as a boundary between the individual and organization, representing the expectations of both parties, and providing a link between the two. Roles that are not clearly defined become dysfunctional and create "tension, turnover, dissatisfactions, anxiety, and lower performance" (Schuler et al., 1977, p. 112).

Much research has been done on the effect of role ambiguity and conflict on job satisfaction and performance in both the business and education venues in a very general way (Bauer & Simmons, 2000; Fried et al. 1998; Johnson et al., 1998; Netemeyer et al.; 1990; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Sawyer, 1992; Schuler et al., 1977; Singh, Verbeke, & Rhodes, 1991; Van Sell et al., 1981). The results are clear that both ambiguity and conflict have a negative impact on job satisfaction and performance. The more people are unclear about what they are to do, the more likely it is that they will not meet expectations and the unhappier they will be with their job circumstances (Rizzo et al., 1970; Van Sell et al., 1981). Although these two factors are highly connected, they still can function independently and will be treated separately.

Role ambiguity is defined as "the degree to which clear information is lacking regarding (a) the expectations associated with a role (b) methods for fulfilling known role expectations, and/or (c) the consequences of role performance" (Van Sell et al., 1981, p. 44). Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970) used a similar definition in supporting their scales for measuring ambiguity. They point to the components of "certainty about duties, authority, allocation of time, and relationships with others; the clarity or existence of

guides, directives, policies; and the ability to predict sanctions as outcomes of behavior"
(p. 156). There are, then, several opportunities for ambiguity to become a factor in an
employee's performance or satisfaction. First, the actual job itself may be undefined.
This is certainly the case with assistant principals (Hartzel et al., 1995; Reed & Himmler,
1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). Scoggins and Bishop's 1993 review of literature
concerning the role of the assistant principal found that the list of tasks assigned to
assistants varied widely when that list even existed.

Second, the way to carry out job expectations may be unstated or unclear. Again,
this is especially true for assistant principals whose academic training in administration
(which means the principalship) provides no direction for the jobs that are passed along
to the assistant. There are no courses in discipline or attendance records in an
administrative degree programs (Marshall, 1992). It is also most unlikely that there is a
formal evaluation process in place with clear criteria. Marshall (1992, p. 35) described
the assistanceship as consisting of "poorly defined tasks, ambiguous expectations, and
few formal measures for evaluating achievement or task accomplishment."

Third, roles can become ambiguous because as an organization changes, so too
will the role expectations (Chambers, Moore & Bachtel, 1998). It is important to note that
ambiguity may be the result of lack of communication from the authority that defines a
particular role, but it also may result from the way the employee perceives the
information given to him/her. Most research on ambiguity uses a self-report
questionnaire that only records the employee's perception and does not determine
whether or not there is in reality a stated expectation that should be clear (Bauer &
Simmons, 2000; Sawyer, 1992). Sawyer also suggested that two types of ambiguity,

process and goals, should be studied separately because the effects are different. An employee may know what the goal or responsibility is but not how to achieve it; while, on the other hand, he may know what specifically he is to be doing but not perceive the end goal.

The part that role ambiguity has in job satisfaction is not absolutely clear. Research done with principals by Crowson and Porter-Gehrie (1980) found that urban principals enjoyed having discretionary power (ambiguity) in some areas because it allowed them to make critical decisions based on circumstances rather than tightly regulated policy. They made use of their flexibility to set their own standards. This flexibility satisfied them and increased job performance. On the other hand, assistant principals are not in the position to make use of discretion to the same degree. They are always immediately accountable to a supervisor whose policies and philosophy are the managing guidelines. In that case, uncertainty about the managing guidelines leads to ambiguity, stress, and lower performance (Marshall, 1992). It appears that, for high-level administrators, flexibility and ambiguity may be useful, but not necessarily for lower level administrators (Marshall, 1992).

This may account for the small discrepancies in study results from various occupations. The vast majority of evidence from studies using self-report questionnaires indicates a strong relationship between role ambiguity and job dissatisfaction (Rizzo et al., 1970; Van Sell et al., 1981); however, there are a few studies that show no relationship for nurses' aides, teachers, managers, supervisors (Van Sell et al.) and sales representatives (Netemeyer et al., 1990). Most studies find a relationship between ambiguity and stress, while a few do not (Van Sell et al.).   Van Sell, Schuler, and Brief

speculated that this may have to do with the amount of participation in job-related decisions. Netemeyer, Johnston, and Burton (1990) confirmed that role ambiguity may affect individuals in various jobs differently perhaps because of job attitudes and behaviors.

Bauer and Simmons (2000) suggested that role definition is cyclical in that it may require a series of interactions to avoid ambiguity. This means that results of measures of ambiguity may vary depending on where the employee is in his/her cycle of interactions. Bauer and Simmons also supported the idea that the relationship between ambiguity and various outcomes is curvilinear because a certain amount of ambiguity can provide motivation where excessive amounts produce stress. It appears that managers who wish to increase productivity need to be aware of how much ambiguity (or discretion) is motivating and how much is stressful.

<div align="center">Role Conflict</div>

Role conflict research stems from classical organizational theory that posits that there should be a consistent chain of command and unity of command (Rizzo et al., 1970). This means that only one set of instructions goes to any one employee and there is a "single flow of authority from the top to the bottom" (p. 150). There is no confusion or conflict in command. Role theory supports this idea by proposing that inconsistent directions produce stress, dissatisfaction, and low performance. Most of the research on role conflict has been done in a business context.

There are several types of role conflict according to Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). The first is person-role conflict (intra-role) where there is conflict between the person's standard or values and the jobs he has been assigned. The second is conflict

between the time, resources or abilities of the employee and the expectations of the job. This may arise from another person or the organization itself. The third type is inter-role conflict for someone who has several responsibilities that conflict with each other. Finally, there is the possibility of conflicting expectations from organizational policies or evaluation procedures. This type of conflict was noted by Marshall (1993) as being particularly stressful for educators because educational policies change frequently and school, local, state, and federal mandates are often in conflict. Van Sell, Brief and Schuler (1981) added to that list "inter-sender conflict" where incompatible directions come from more than one authority.

Marshall (1993) focused on the issues of assistant principals. She pointed out that a common source of conflict, especially for female administrators, is the conflict between obligations at home and obligations inherent in the job because there are so many evening and weekend activities. This type of conflict not only has an effect on job performance and satisfaction, but it can also be a factor in deciding whether or not to remain in the assistanceship.

Most of the research in this area has focused on the relationship between the focal person (receiver of instructions) and role senders with special attention to organizational, personal, and interpersonal factors (Van Sell et al., 1981). Organizational subfactors can be the subject's level in the organization, role requirements, task characteristics, physical setting, and organizational factors. The personal subfactors are age, sex, and tenure in the organization. Interpersonal subfactors include frequency of interaction, mode of communication, importance of senders to focal person, physical location, visibility, feedback, and participation between the senders and the focal person.

There is a significant body of work that points to a relationship between role

conflict and job dissatisfaction and job-related tension, but it is not absolutely conclusive

(Van Sell et al., 1981). Various studies have produced inconsistent, moderately

conflicting results. It is generally still held that conflict is negatively associated with

satisfaction and performance, but it may only be when in the presence of ambiguity or

other stress-inducing factors (Fried et al., 1998). Fried, Ben-David, Tieg, Avital, and

Yeverchyahu's work (1998) indicated a strong interactive effect between role ambiguity

and role conflict.

Mentoring

New assistant principals and principals frequently point to their lack of training

when they begin an administrative job (Hartzell et al., 1995; Marshall, 1992; 1993).

They often cite a paucity of practical training in the daily performance of tasks critical to

school management as well as student learning. This promotes feelings of insecurity,

uncertainty, stress, and frustration because being an effective administrator seems to

depend on learning by trial and error. "When college/university programs in educational

administration focus more on theory than on practicality, it becomes even more critical

for beginning administrators to have a support system such as mentoring" (Monsour,

1998, p. 96). With the increasing complexity of the principalship and the heavy emphasis

on principal responsibility for student performance, there is little time for a new principal

to learn by trial and error (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,

2000).

Even in the day-to-day management of schools, assistant principals rarely are

responsible for those tasks normally assumed to be the domain of a principal such as

curricular and instructional leadership and teacher evaluation (Wells, Scollay, &

Rinehart, 1999). Despite the fact that the assistanceship is touted as a "stepping stone" to

the principalship, it is not the most effective training vehicle for new principals

(Ketterman, 2002; Martin, 1997; Wells, Scollay, & Rinehart, 1999).

The question, in light of administrative shortages and inadequate prior training,

then becomes: How do school systems provide support and opportunities for skill

acquisition during the early stages of a principal's career? Many researchers and

educators report that having a formal mentoring program is critical to facilitating the

early success of a new administrator (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Daresh & Playko,

1992; Ginty, 1995; Monsour, 1998; Skelly, 1996; Winn, 1993). Winn's research in 1993

pinpointed having a mentor, ambition, and hard work as the three most significant factors

to career progress according to a group of principals. Benefits to the new administrator

include a reduced feeling of isolation (Ginty), smoother transition, helpful feedback and

guidance, a ready source for answers to routine problems, and role models for

communication and political maneuvering (Anderson, 1994; Monsour).

The concept of the mentoring relationship originated in Homer's *Odyssey*. When

Odysseus is called upon to serve in the Trojan War, he leaves the education and military

training of his son, Telemachus, to the wise teacher, Mentor. Mentor served not only as a

teacher, but as a guide while Telemachus grows to adulthood without a father. That sort

of relationship, based on trust and respect, can be helpful in a variety of settings in our

world today. Business and education alike have adopted the idea of mentoring as an

important component of management training (Daresh, 1995). An article titled "Teacher

Mentoring" (1986) provided a modern-day definition of mentoring that sounds very

much like the kind of relationship described in the *Odyssey*; it is the "establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance" (p. 1).

There are two venues where mentoring programs are currently taking place. One is in the preservice training offered at colleges and universities. This approach offers training similar to what teachers have when they work with experienced teachers in their student teaching program. The other mentoring strategy is for beginning administrators and is designed to provide support as a principal or assistant principal encounters difficulties and needs consultation on how to handle various challenges (Daresh, 1995). There is some research that indicates that the type of mentoring is not significant in obtaining an initial administrative position (Hall, 2000).

A review of the literature on improving the effectiveness of assistant principals by Harris (1998) indicated repeatedly that providing mentors for new assistant principals improves their leadership skills a number of ways. First, the assistant principals gain valuable immediate feedback on challenging situations that require quick thinking and experience that they may not have. Second, mentoring promotes the collaborative leadership so necessary to function on an administrative team. It helps new administrators learn how to work together with others for the best possible solution to problems. Third, it provides positive emotional support so that a new administrator does not feel so isolated or even abandoned.

Mentors, in addition to the protégés, receive benefits (Daresh, 1995; Riordan & Hildebrandt, 1995). Experienced administrators have an opportunity to engage in self-reflection and analysis that may make them stronger leaders. It also allows them the

pleasure of sharing their experiences (successes and failures) in a way that helps someone else grow.

An additional benefit to the mentoring system is the political assistance that may be an invaluable asset when trying to get an administrative job or changing jobs. Establishing a positive relationship with someone within the system who has influence can make the difference in an advancing career. Seventy-five percent of the 96 high school principals who were surveyed by Anderson (1994) about the influence of mentoring said that their experience with a mentor helped in obtaining an administrative position.

<center>Career Stability</center>

In light of the need for some talented assistant principals to step up to the job of principal and for some to remain in the recently-recognized, increasingly important role of assistant principal, it is imperative to look at ways to make training meaningful, to make both career tracks attractive and rewarding, and to remove the stigma from the assistanceship as a career. A thorough study of the assistant principal's job will better define the role and a look at what happens to those qualified individuals who leave administration or leave education altogether will provide guidance for training and retention programs for good administrators.

Marshall (1992, 1993) devoted a great deal of study to the assistant principal's job and determined that assistants generally fall into one of six categories in terms of career stability. The "upwardly mobile" assistant is active in professional organizations, is likely to have a mentor, and is actively pursuing experiences that will be helpful in obtaining and being successful in the principalship. The upwardly mobile person has had

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from three to twenty years of experience in the classroom and is in the mid 20s to 40 in age. This assistant networks and understands the political necessities of his situation and avoids defiance of superiors and demonstrate loyalty. The "career" assistant has no desire to be principal, but is effective and skilled at his job. The career assistant may place high priority on family and personal life. He is more involved at the school level than the district or association level. He is proud of what he does and works hard to be accomplished.

The "plateaued" assistant has the aspirations to be principal but not the skills or backing. He has been turned down for promotion several times and lacks a mentor to help him navigate the political requirements. The "shafted" assistant also has aspirations for a principalship, but has not reached this goal due to external factors not necessarily his own lack of skills. Those external factors can be a change in leadership or simply a lack of open positions for a lengthy period of time. The assistant principal "who considers leaving" is young and has the skills to pursue a more lucrative career outside of education. Finally, the "downwardly mobile" administrator has moved from administration back to the classroom either voluntarily or involuntarily.

In light of the predicted shortages of qualified principals and assistant principals in the near future, a study on recruitment and retention factors would provide helpful information. Data gathered from assistant principals may suggest what incentives would motivate them to stay in education administration. This, in turn, would provide school boards and universities with suggestions for their programs.

Chapter Three

Method

The purpose of this study is to determine what factors influence the career stability of assistant principals in order to guide training and recruitment programs in the future. There is a demonstrable need for good assistant principals and good principals and an anticipated shortage of qualified individuals willing and interested in taking on those jobs. It is important to determine the factors that will encourage qualified assistant principals to stay where they are in administration to provide stable, long-term leadership in schools and the factors that will encourage other qualified assistant principals to aspire to the principalship.

This study was a nonexperimental study using a mailed survey for ex post facto research (McMillan & Wergin, 2002). The study used a cross-sectional design (Wiermsa, 1995). This chapter will describe the population and sample, along with the instrumentation used to gather data, procedures for conducting the study, and methods used for data analysis.

Population and Sample

A survey was mailed to a random sampling of all current secondary assistant principals who are members of National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). According to the NASSP, there are 9,777 (N=9777) vice, associate, or assistant principals who belong to their organization. Minimum sample size for that large a population is 370 (McNamara, 1994). Sample size for this study was 612 (n=612) using a systematic random selection procedure with an interval of 16 (K=16; Knoke &

Bohrnstedt, 1994). This sample was sufficient to allow generalization of the findings to the population (M. Cunningham, Personal Communication, September 25, 2003).

<center>Design</center>

"As schools attempt to respond to a more diverse student population and meet the learning needs of more students, assistant principals may well assume an increasingly important role in the principalship" (Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991, p. 59-60). In light of that importance, it is imperative that studies of the assistant principalship be conducted in order to learn how to strengthen that role as well as the role of the principal. This study examined the aspirations of assistant principals and explored the reasons for them.

The independent variables of role conflict, role ambiguity, participation in a mentoring program, and participation in an administrative team were correlated with the dependent variable of stability of career aspirations (remaining an assistant, becoming a principal or another type of administrator, returning to the classroom or leaving education all together) using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The survey also allowed for participants to suggest additional factors that might be significant in this study.

A pilot study of 10 experts (see Appendix C) was conducted to test the usefulness of the instrument used. This study, along with the assured anonymity of the respondents, contributed to more accurate responses (Babbie, 1973). The response rate of 65% exceeded the minimum response rate of 50% plus one, which helped assure reliability and validity (Kerlinger, 1986).

Instrumentation

This study used the *Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey* consisting of three parts. The first section gathered demographic information (age, sex, number of years in education, and number of years in administration). The next section consisted of four questions. First, participants chose the following career directions: remain an assistant principal, become a principal or other administrator, leave education all together, or return to the classroom. Next they were asked to describe the administrative process at their school using a multiple choice question. The last two questions concerned their experiences with mentorship. First, they were asked the nature of their experience and then the duration.

The next section consisted of the *Rizzo, House, Lirtzman Role Conflict Scale* and *Role Ambiguity Scale.* The *Role Conflict Scale* consists of eight items using a four-point Likert response format (agree-disagree). The *Role Ambiguity Scale* has six items with the same type of scale. These scales have been shown to have sufficient reliability and construct validity for continued use (Netemeyer et al., 1990; Schuler et al., 1977).

Finally, participants were given an opportunity to elaborate on any factors that they considered critical in their career decision process. This was in the form of an open-ended question.

Data Analysis

Data from each section was entered into SPSS data analysis software for each participant. This gave 21 pieces of data for each respondent. Mean scores were then computed for each individual question as well as a combined mean score for Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict. The mentor question had five possible responses ranging

from the most extensive experience to no experience at all. The administrative team question had four possible answers that were ranked from most desirable (administrative team) to least desirable (hierarchy). The four career choices were also ranked from most desirable (aspirant) to least desirable (exiter).

Then, each of the independent variables (administrative process, mentor experience, role conflict, and role ambiguity) were correlated with the dependent variable (career choice) using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient in SPSS. In addition, each of the demographic factors and each individual question from the Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity Scales were correlated with career choice using the same statistical process.

The data from the open-ended question were tallied by grouping responses into categories. The responses were then compared to the statistical data to see if the open-ended responses supported or contradicted the statistical data. Finally, Chronbach's Coefficient Alpha was run on the *Role Conflict Scale* and *Role Ambiguity Scale* to check for reliability.

Chapter Four

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Chapter Four of this study is a presentation of the data gathered from the *Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey* (See Appendix F) and a statistical analysis of those data. A review of the population and sample is followed by a discussion of data collection, and finally each variable will be presented in relationship to assistant principal aspirations.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was the current vice, assistant, or associate principal membership of the National Association of Secondary Principals (N=9777). These members are placed at a middle school or high school with grade configurations in any combination from 5th to 12th grade. The survey was mailed to 612 members (n=612) who were electronically randomly selected by the NASSP mailing service contractor, INFOCUS, who chose every 16th name from the NASSP zip code mailing list. Of those mailed, one was returned as undeliverable, and six were returned by the respondents who indicated that they were no longer assistant principals. This left a total sample of 605. Three hundred and ninety-four participants returned their surveys and contributed to the data for a return rate of 65%.

Method of Data Collection

A panel of 10 experts (See Appendix C) was asked to fill out the questionnaire and comment on the readability and clarity of the instrument. The only comments concerned the items that were included from the *Rizzo, House, Lirtzman Role Conflict*

Scale and *Role Ambiguity Scale* (1970). The eight items on role conflict are stated positively (if you agree then there is conflict) and the six items on role ambiguity are stated negatively (if you agree then there is not ambiguity). While it is generally recommended by survey-makers that questions work in the same direction, this instrument has been used for 30 years and has been tested successfully for reliability. For verification, Chronbach's Correlation Alpha was conducted on ambiguity and conflict separately to determine whether the questions in each section do measure the same thing. On a scale of .000 to 1.000, the eight questions for role conflict produced an Alpha score of .8520, which is considered reliable. The six items for role ambiguity produced an Alpha score of .7465, which is also an indicator of reliability. Because of the established reliability, it was decided to keep the questions in the original form.

Each of the 612 potential participants received a mailing consisting of an introductory letter (see Appendix E), a one-page, legal-size survey and a self-addressed stamped return envelope. After two weeks, those not yet responding received a follow-up mailing with a reminder letter (see Appendix F), a copy of the survey, and a return envelope.

The survey itself consisted of 21 questions. The first four were demographic and asked for the respondent's age, sex, total years of educational experience, and years of administrative experience. Next came three multiple choice questions. The first asked for the respondent to indicate their career plans in the next five to 10 years. They could choose from:

    1. Become a principal

    2. Remain an assistant

3. Leave administration and stay in education

4. Leave education all together

5. Other

The next question inquired about the administrative process at the respondent's school. The choices were:

1. The principal makes all decisions and the assistant(s) are delegated tasks (hierarchy)

2. The principal has primary responsibility for decision making, but consults with the assistant(s) about their specific tasks (shared hierarchy)

3. The principals assign the assistants specific tasks for which they are completely responsible (partial teaming)

4. The principal and assistant principal(s) share decision making on most tasks (administrative team)

The last question in this section asked about the respondent's mentoring experience. Participants could choose from:

1. Formal district sponsored mentor program

2. Formal pre-service mentor program during administrative training, informal mentoring within a district either while striving to become an administrator or after becoming one

3. Informal mentoring during first administrative assignment within a school

4. No mentoring experience

Those that chose one of the first three responses were asked to indicate how long the experience lasted. The duration was expressed in months.

The final section of the survey consisted of 14 questions from the *Rizzo, House, Lirtzman Role Conflict Scale* and *Role Ambiguity Scale*. Questions one through eight come from the *Role Conflict Scale* and were answered with a four-point Likert response format (agree-disagree). The questions were:

1. I have to do tasks that should be done differently

2. I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it

3. I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment

4. I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently

5. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people

6. I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others

7. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it

8. I work on unnecessary tasks

The final six questions came from the *Role Ambiguity Scale* and were also answered with the same four-point Likert response format (agree-disagree). The choices were:

1. I feel certain about how much authority I have

2. Clear, planned goals and objectives exist for my job

3. I know that I have divided my time properly

4. I know what my responsibilities are

5. I know exactly what is expected of me

6. Explanation is clear of what has to be done

Finally, the survey concluded with an open-ended question that asked participants to discuss any factors that have had an effect on future career plans. Respondents were

provided with space to list or discuss issues that needed elaboration. Two hundred and sixty-nine of the participants chose to provide additional information in this section.

Data from the 21 questions were accumulated from each returned survey and entered into SPSS for analysis using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (*r*). All of the dependent variables (age, sex, years of experience, administrative experience, teaming, conflict, ambiguity, and mentoring) were correlated with the independent variable, career stability. The open-ended question was analyzed by listing all of the responses to that question and then grouping the responses into categories and tabulating the number of answers.

Major Findings

The dependent variable for this study is career stability as measured by assistant principal responses to one question on the *Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey*. The question gave the respondents the opportunity to characterize their career goals for the next five to ten years as:

1. Become a principal

2. Remain an assistant

3. Leave administration and stay in education

4. Leave education all together

5. Other

This variable was correlated with all other variables using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to determine if there was a significant relationship. The data for the dependent variable are discussed first and then each independent variable is discussed in relation to the research question pertaining to that variable.

Career Stability

Career stability was defined by the career choices assistant principals intend to make over the next five to ten years. Two hundred and twenty-five of the respondents (57.4%) said that they wish to become a principal during that time period. Eighty (20.3%) said that they would prefer to remain an assistant principal. Those two categories would be the most desirable outcome of good training programs, recruitment programs, and positive working conditions. The total responses in those two areas is 77.7%.

Fourteen respondents (3.6%) said that they wished to leave administration but stay in education, and thirty-six (9.1%) said that they wished to leave education altogether. The final choice (Other) was marked by thirty-seven (9.4%) respondents (See Table 1). The comments of those individuals will be analyzed in the open-ended question section.

Table 1

Career goals for the next five to ten years

Aspiration	Frequency	Percentage
Become principal	225	57.4%
Remain an assistant	80	20.3%
Leave administration, Remain in education	14	3.6%
Leave education	36	9.2%
Other	37	9.4%

Administrative Teams

Q1: Is there a correlation between an assistant principal's perception of his/her participation in an administrative team and his/her career stability?

Participants were asked to describe the general administrative decision-making process at their school by choosing one of four possibilities which were described as Hierarchy, Shared Hierarchy, Partial Teaming, and Team. The literature has pointed to the last choice (team) as the optimum approach for efficient and effective leadership (The Assistant Principals Commission, 1980; Calabrese, 1991; Michel, 1996; Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991; Williams, 1995), so that choice was considered the most desirable. The opposite choice (hierarchy) was considered the least desirable.

Eighteen of the respondents (4.6%) chose Hierarchy as the predominant process at their school. Ninety-two respondents (23.4 %) chose Shared Hierarchy. Ninety-eight

respondents (24.9%) chose Partial Teaming and 179 (45.4%) chose Team (See Table 2).

When correlated with the independent variable of career stability using the Pearson

Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, a score of -.120 was obtained (See Appendix

B). This correlation was significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). This score indicates that

an assistant principal who works in a team-oriented decision-making environment will be

more likely to wish to either remain an assistant principal or move up to the principalship.

Table 2

Perception of Administrative Team Process

Administrative Process	Frequency	Percentage
Hierarchy	18	4.6%
Shared Hierarchy	92	23.4%
Partial teaming	98	24.9%
Team	179	45.4%

Role Ambiguity

Q2: Is there a correlation between role ambiguity and the career stability of assistant

principals?

The responses in this section of the survey were designed as Likert-type answers with

(1) Agree, (2) Slightly Agree, (3) Slightly Disagree, and (4) Disagree. The questions

were designed to elicit information about how the respondent feels about the clarity of

his/her work expectations. A mean score was determined for each of the questions

individually (See Table 3), and then an overall ambiguity mean was calculated. The

overall mean of 1.8659 indicates that answers grouped around Slightly Agree, meaning

that the respondents felt fairly positive that their job expectations were clear.

When correlated with career stability using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation

Coefficient, a score of .012 was obtained (See Appendix B). The score was not

significant and indicates that ambiguity is not a factor in career decision making for

assistant principals.

Table 3

Correlations of Individual Ambiguity Questions with Career Plans

Question	Correlation with plans
1. I feel certain about how much authority I have	.068
2. Clear, planned goals and objectives exist for my job	-.026
3. I know that I have divided my time properly	-.069
4. I know what my responsibilities are	.011
5. I know exactly what is expected of me	.039
6. Explanation is clear of what has to be done	.051

Role Conflict

Q3: Is there a correlation between role conflict and the career stability of assistant

principals?

Role conflict is the discrepancy in expectations placed on an individual by outside

sources (supervisors, stakeholders, laws or policies) and /or by the individual himself.

Again, these questions were designed with the following Likert-type responses: (1)

Agree, (2) Slightly Agree, (3) Slightly Disagree, and (4) Disagree. The mean for these

eight questions about conflict was 2.7219 indicating that the answers clustered around

Slightly Disagree. This score indicates a feeling among the respondents that they do not

encounter a significant amount of conflict in their job expectations. The correlation for

this variable using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was -.059 (See

Appendix B), which means that conflict is not a significant factor in the decision-making

process of assistant principals.

The means of individual items were also correlated with the mean of career plans

using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (See Table 4). Three items

were found to have significance at the 0.05 level (2 tailed). They were: 2) I receive an

assignment without the manpower to complete it (negative correlation of -.100), 3) I have

to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment (negative correlation of

-.113), and 8) I work on unnecessary tasks (negative correlation of -.107). These

negative correlations indicate that assistant principals did not feel that these statements

were significantly true about their jobs and that the lack of conflict was a positive

influence on their career stability.

Table 4

Correlations of Individual Conflict Questions with Career Plans

Question	Correlation
1. I have to do tasks that should be done differently	-.036
2. I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it	-.100*
3. I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment	-.113*
4. I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently	.025
5. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people	.001
6. I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and accepted one person and accepted by others	.046
7. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it	-.079
8. I work on unnecessary tasks	-.107*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Mentoring

Q4: Is there a correlation between an assistant principal's participation in a mentor program and his/her career stability?

The mentoring question was designed to determine what type of mentoring experience the respondents have had and whether it relates to their career decision-making. There were five choices (See Table 5) and 52 (13.2%) respondents said that they had participated in a formal district sponsored mentor program. Formal pre-service program during administrative training was chosen by 33 individuals (8.4%). Forty-two

respondents (10.7%) chose informal mentoring within a district either while striving to become an administrator or after becoming one. Seventy-six respondents (19.3%) chose informal mentoring during their first administrative assignment within their school. Finally, 190 respondents (48.2%) chose no mentoring experience. Approximately half (51.7%) participated in some kind of mentorship program.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient for mentoring and career plans produced a .171 coefficient which is considered significant at the .01 level (See Appendix B). This relationship indicates that a mentoring experience is a factor in assistant principal career decision making.

Table 5

Perception of Mentoring Experience

Type of Program	Frequency	Percent
Formal district	52	13.2%
Formal preservice	33	8.4%
Informal preservice	42	10.7
Informal within school	76	19.3%
None	190	48.2%

Demographic Factors

Q5: Are there additional factors that influence an assistant principal's career stability?

Three out of the four demographic factors that were included in the survey had significance in the career decisions of assistant principals when analyzed with the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (See Table 6). The mean age for

respondents was 45 and the correlation with future plans was .447, which is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The mean for total years of experience in education was 20. Using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, a correlation of .436 was obtained which is significant to the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Finally, the mean for number of years of administrative experience was 7.3. The number also indicated significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) when correlated with future plans of assistant principals. The correlation coefficient was .365. These three factors (age, total years in education, years in administration) would appear to indicate significance because the higher numbers for those factors correlate positively with the higher numbers for career plans (Leave education altogether and Other). Those choices were most often used by individuals who also indicated in the open-ended question that they were retiring.

Sex is the only demographic factor that did not reveal significance. There were 131 female respondents and 263 male respondents (almost exactly a one to two ratio). The correlation coefficient was .003, which indicates no significance.

Table 6

Correlation of Demographic Factors with Career Plans

Factor	Mean	Correlation
Age	44.96	.447**
Sex	1.67 (1=female, 2=male)	.003
Total years in education	20.15	.436**
Years of administrative experience	7.30	.365**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Other Findings

The open-ended item which asked respondents to list or discuss any factors that affected future career plans elicited a large response. Two hundred and sixty-nine participants pointed to at least one factor in decision making. The responses were listed and then grouped into categories. They were finally analyzed as positive or negative factors. Those findings are outlined in Appendix A.

Several of the factors discussed support the findings from the main part of the survey. One of the largest categories was "Support from friends, colleagues, and mentors." Eleven percent of the total respondents and sixteen percent of the open-ended question respondents mentioned the benefit of having some kind of mentoring support that encourages staying in educational administration and moving on to a principalship.

Nine participants referred to the benefit of shared responsibilities or a team approach to administration. Other participants referred to personality conflicts as a draw back and

working with teachers as a benefit. These responses support the finding in the main part of the survey that working on an administrative team has an impact on career decisions.

While ambiguity and conflict were not significantly correlated with career decisions of assistant principals in the body of the survey, a number of respondents (63 total) mentioned district, state, and federal mandates and the conflicts they produce as a factor in possible career decisions. Also the thirty-two respondents who cited stress, burnout, complexity of job, and understaffing implied some conflict in their jobs.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter provides an overview of the purpose and procedures used in this study, as well as a summary of findings and conclusions. The chapter will conclude with implications and recommendations.

Summary of Purpose

This study was designed to look at the current views of assistant principals about their career goals and the factors that shape those goals. A survey of a random sampling of assistant principals who are members of the National Association of Secondary School Principals was conducted to determine how various factors discussed in the literature on education affect their job aspirations.

In order to avert a potential crisis in leadership during the next several decades, it is important to determine what will attract and keep qualified individuals in educational leadership roles. Job descriptions and responsibilities, training, support systems, and benefits must all be considered when teacher/principal training programs are being devised by universities and hiring practices are outlined by hiring boards. Information from this study may be helpful to those entities for future planning.

This study was designed examine the factors that will encourage or discourage assistant principals to remain in administration so that our schools will retain strong leadership. The following research question guided this study:

Q1: Is there a correlation between an assistant principal's perception of his/her participation in an administrative team and his/her career stability?

Q2: Is there a correlation between role ambiguity and the career stability of assistant principals?

Q3: Is there a correlation between role conflict and the career stability of assistant principals?

Q4: Is there a correlation between an assistant principal's participation in a mentor program and his/her career stability?

Q5: Are there additional factors that influence an assistant principal's career stability?

Summary of Procedures

A survey consisting of 21 questions plus one open-ended question was mailed to 612 of the assistant principals who are members of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (N=9,777) to gather data about their career plans and the various factors that influence them. Usable data from *The Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey* was returned by 394 participants. One survey was returned as undeliverable and six were returned by individuals no longer serving as assistant principals, so the final sample was 605. The return rate was 65%, which exceeded the 50% plus one criteria established by Kerlinger (1986).

The data were entered into a data base and input into the SPSS computer software program for data analysis. The information from the open-ended question was listed, then grouped into like responses, and tabulated.

Summary of Findings

Each independent variable was correlated with the dependent variable (career plans) using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation in SPSS to determine any relationship among the factors. Administrative team process and mentoring showed significance, but

role ambiguity and conflict did not, although three of the individual items under role

conflict showed significant correlation with career plans. In addition, age, number of

years in education, and total years in administration also showed significance when

correlated with career plans.

<center>Administrative Teams</center>

Q1: Is there a correlation between an assistant principal's perception of his/her

participation in an administrative team and his/her career stability?

There is significant research to support the idea that the leadership of a school should

operate as an administrative team rather than a hierarchy (The Assistant Principals

Commission, 1980); Calabrese, 1991; Michel, 1996; Pellicer & Stevenson, 1991;

Williams, 1995). When assistants are included in the decision-making process of the

school and work on all aspects of school administration from management to

instructional leadership, they are more inclined to feel comfortable in their jobs and wish

to remain as assistants or move to the principalship. The current study revealed that there

is a significant correlation between career stability and the administrative process of a

school. Of the respondents, 70% indicated that their administration either uses partial

teaming or team methods for decision-making.

In practical terms, this suggests that principals need to be conscious of the fact that

assistants view shared decision-making as a positive working atmosphere. By allowing

assistants to participate in all aspects of administration (e.g., working with teachers

through evaluation, building the schedule, working with parents and the community,

planning curriculum as well as the traditional assistant principal tasks of discipline and

attendance), the principal can create a supportive environment in which the assistant can

flourish. Having experience in all areas of administration builds confidence in assistant principals. Job descriptions from the district office should reflect the same full range of duties.

Not only does the inclusion of assistant principals in the decision-making process in a meaningful way influence positively the career choices of assistant principals, according to business research (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Richardson et al., 1991), but also it facilitates major change, promotes effectiveness, allows people to buy into purpose, and encourages personal growth. The result is greater success for teachers, students, schools, and communities, as well as greater effectiveness for administrators.

<center>Role Ambiguity</center>

Q2: Is there a correlation between role ambiguity and the career stability of assistant principals?

Another factor discussed widely in the literature is role ambiguity, defined as "the degree to which clear information is lacking regarding (a) the expectations associated with a role (b) methods for fulfilling known role expectations, and/or (c) the consequences of role performance" (Van Sell et al., 1981, p. 44). Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970), whose scales were used for this study, discuss the possibility that ambiguity can arise from lack of a description of the job itself, unclear explanations as to how the job is to be carried out, or in changing expectations from external sources.

Contrary to indications in the literature that the role of assistant principal is vague and undefined at best (Hartzel et al, 1995; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993), the 394 participants in this survey indicated that overall they more than slightly agreed that their jobs were clearly defined. This relative lack of ambiguity did not have

<center>57</center>

any effect on their career plans as there was no significant correlation between their plans for the next few years and their perception of the clarity of the job expectations. This may be because individuals who work in education for any length of time understand that ambiguity is an inherent part of the job. There are no standard job descriptions for assistant principals, no standard expectations, and no opportunities to control the daily routine of the job in order to provide clarity in purpose. Most days are spent reacting to problems or crises as they arise, as well as to changing expectations from all levels of the educational hierarchy from the building level to the federal government.

Educators understand that nothing remains the same in their field and eventually everything will change. This consciousness of the nature of education at all levels may allow for assistant principals to feel that their jobs are defined "enough" to allow them to perform their duties without undue stress.

<div align="center">Role Conflict</div>

Q3: Is there a correlation between role conflict and the career stability of assistant principals?

Role conflict has been discussed in the literature for the last 40 years, primarily in a business context using classical organizational theory to describe the way job instructions can produce the best results (Rizzo et al., 1970; Van Sell et al., 1981). While there is support for the idea that role conflict can inhibit job satisfaction and performance, there are some studies that show mixed results (Fried et al., 1998), and indicate the possibility that conflict and ambiguity may have to work in concert to produce negative results.

Marshall (1993) examined conflict in the day-to-day workings of assistant principals and concluded that conflict may be a factor in whether or not assistants choose to stay in

administration. However, the current study showed that, in general, assistants do not feel that there is significant conflict in their roles. The overall mean for conflict of 2.7 indicated that they were closer to slightly disagreeing than to slightly agreeing that there is conflict in their daily work. It is not a strong response, but leaves the possibility of doubt about the role of conflict in the jobs of assistant principals. Again, as with ambiguity, the very nature of the field of education invites conflict because so many entities have a say in what expectations are. For example, in defining the stakeholders in education, literally everyone would be included: (a) children; (b) parents; (c) grandparents; (d) businesses; (e) local, state, and federal governments; (f) communities; and (g) educators. This means that everyone has an opinion and input into the system. There is no way to avoid conflict on a day-to-day basis or a global level. Individuals who enter the education field learn that fact quickly and either adjust to it or move on.

The correlation coefficient of -.045 shows that the lack of conflict does not directly affect career plans. However, three of the eight conflict items had significant correlations with plans. Those items were 2) I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it, 3) I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment, and 8) I work on unnecessary tasks. This would imply that there are situations that produce enough conflict that it makes a difference to the assistant principal.

The first item obviously produces frustration because there are sometimes expectations for a job or duty to be carried out without the human resources to do it. This is most obvious for administrators when they are allocating classroom resources. With heavy emphasis on skills remediation to boost test scores, low teacher/pupils ratios are indicated. However, very few schools or districts are staffed to provide individual

attention to slow learners or children with disabilities. Frustration is also apparent in terms of providing supervision for large groups of students at all times.

Increased demands from various levels of government for more programs, accountability, and paper work without a corresponding increase in assistance have created additional staffing needs. All schools could benefit from more clerical assistance to deal with the shear volume of paperwork and reporting demanded by everyone. A business manager would allow for principals to focus on instructional leadership in a role similar to that of a CEO. Additional clerical help for counselors would allow the counselors to spend more time with students to provide the direct services they need.

The second item reflects the difficulty in carrying out assignments when local, county, state, and federal regulations are in conflict or change so rapidly that they never catch up with each other to become consistent. Finally, policies and regulations that require more paperwork and micromanaging (unnecessary tasks) frustrate administrators and impede their primary purpose to ensure the quality of education for students.

Several items from the open-ended question about additional factors that may affect assistants' career decisions highlight areas of conflict that are at least worth mentioning. Sixty-three respondents cited federal, state, and local mandates as potential conflicts. There was an implication that they could not only conflict with each other, but also with sound educational theory, practical application, and common sense. The respondents strongly indicated that all those mandates were definitely factors they consider when looking at future plans. This discussion of conflicts certainly supports the three individual conflict items from the survey that were significant.

Thirty-two respondents cited stress, burnout, complexity of job, and understaffing as factors in their career decisions. In fact, 20% of the respondents to the open-ended question alluded to some kind of conflict that influenced their job decisions. These represent possible conflicting situations that have a negative impact on assistant principals. So, while overall there does not seem to be significant conflict in the working lives of assistant principals, there is enough for conflict to be a factor in decision-making about the future.

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

Q4: Is there a correlation between an assistant principal's participation in a mentor program and his/her career stability?

There is significant research on the lack of specific training for assistant principals (Hartzell et al., 1995; Marshall, 1992;1993) and the importance of a mentor program of some sort to make up for that dearth of instruction (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Ginty, 1995; Monsour, 1998; Skelly, 1996; Winn, 1993). *The Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey* results confirm the importance of the relationship between mentor and protégé.

Because of the uncertainty surrounding the role of the assistant principal in the leadership of schools, it appears that very valuable help is provided to assistants in the form of some kind of mentorship. Having someone who provides support either on a day-to-day basis or on a consultative basis seems to be helpful training for assistant principals as well as being greatly appreciated. Forty-two respondents (11% of the total and the second highest factor) mentioned the support of friends and colleagues as a critical factor in their career decisions. They spoke enthusiastically about the role of

mentors in their positive attitude about their jobs. It might seem that the presence of a mentor can help offset any ambiguity or conflict that would ordinarily impede the pursuit of a career in educational leadership because they can advise the mentee on how to handle a situation.

<div align="center">Other Findings</div>

Q5: Are there additional factors that influence an assistant principal's career stability?

The demographic factors of age, total years in education, and administrative experience all showed significance when correlated with future plans (career stability). These factors relate to the 18% of respondents who said in the open-ended question that they would soon retire. This was the most often mentioned factor. Age and length of service automatically correlate with possible retirement. Obviously, the longer someone has been in education and the older he/she is, the more likely it is that in the next five to ten years, retirement is a real possibility.

The only demographic factor that did not show significance was sex. Two respondents to the open-ended question mentioned sex as an inhibiting factor in their desire to seek a principalship. One worked in a parochial school and felt that she was automatically excluded because of sex. Otherwise it seems that women have the same encouragements and inhibitions as men in terms of seeking the principalship and staying in a leadership role.

Respondents mentioned both positive and negative factors in their desire to either remain an assistant or move into the principalship when answering the open-ended question (See Appendix A). The second most common response (after retirement) was the support of friends, colleagues, and mentors. Seventeen percent of the respondents

alluded to support from individuals in the education field as an important factor in their desire to remain in administration. Along with that, 16% of the respondents felt confident about their abilities to be a good leader, 6% wanted to help students, 6% cited the opportunities for continuing education and staff development, 3% said they liked their job, and 2% cited a need for instructional leaders. Those positive influences all encourage assistant principals to remain in administration.

On the negative side, the 20% who cited conflict issues were generally adamant in their lack of desire to put themselves in a principalship that would only increase the level of conflict. Other negative factors were time and family issues (22%), pay (7%), lack of appreciation on the part of parents and society (3%), and health or fatigue (2%). Interestingly, the positive seemed to outweigh the negative so that perhaps it is the major factor of age and retirement that is primarily contributing to the potential shortages for administrators.

Conclusions

There is a real crisis in education administration because fewer assistant principals are willing to strive to fill principal positions due to a number of factors. They include being close to retirement age and various negative factors such as conflict, stress, time and family issues, and lack of appreciation. Those factors should be addressed if the strong leadership required for effective schools is going to be in place in the near future. There are also clearly several positive factors that can be encouraged in order to ensure the growth and success of our schools. Only 57% of assistant principals wish to "move up" to the principalship which is not nearly enough to fill the voids left by those principals

who are retiring and new jobs that are opening up in areas where school populations are growing rapidly.

Age is apparently a factor for assistant principals as well as principals and an effort to address the aging population in administration by recruiting more young people needs to be taken under advisement. Also, assistant principals wish to be part of administrative teams where they participate in all aspects of school leadership. They are only prepared to move to the principalship when they are leaders, not just managers. Assistants benefit from mentoring programs that help prepare them for the next level by providing quick answers for immediate questions and, perhaps more importantly, encouragement and support that builds confidence.

While conflict and ambiguity are not necessarily factors in general in career choices, assistants are concerned about conflict and the demands of outside agencies on an increasingly complex job. Many felt they worked on unnecessary tasks and did not have adequate resources to carry out the tasks that are necessary. They also felt that rules or policies sometimes get in the way of doing an effective job.

The literature is clear that a trend is developing in American education for assistant principals no longer to regard the principalship necessarily as the traditional "stepping stone" to the principalship. In 1970, Austin and Brown's research revealed that 80% of all assistant principals wished to become principals. By 1991, studies indicated that 50% of all assistant principals wished to remain in their current positions. The results of the current study which surveyed 612 assistant principals around the country support that trend. Of the 605 assistants finally counted as the sample, 394 responded and contributed data to this study. These assistant principals indicated that only 57.4% aspired to the

principalship and 20.4% wished to remain as an assistant. The total of these two groups together is 77.8%, which is less than the group in 1970 who wished to move up to the principalship.

Recent studies (Cushing et al., 2003; Goodwin, 2002) have supported the idea that while there are qualified individuals available (assistant principals) for principal positions, they do not wish to move into the principalship in sufficient numbers to avoid shortages. The current study results confirm that prediction of shortages. Some potential reasons for the reluctance of assistants to move up were addressed in the open-ended section of this study. Goodwin's study (2002) dealt with the changing nature of the principalship within the context of chaos theory. She studied the ways in which the traditional role of a principal has come to an awkward balance of managerial and leadership tasks.

Because the principal determines the nature of the assistant principal's job (Clemons, 1989), assistant principals are succumbing to the same job pressures as principals. Time demands, shifts in roles, lack of clarity in job definitions, and conflicting expectations (Portin et al., 1998; Prince Edward Island, Canada, 2000) have not only changed the role of the principal, it may be deterring assistant principals from wishing to become principals according to the current study. Individuals (22%) in this current survey indicated that family/time concerns were very important, and since the administration of a school demanded more time in 1998 than five years earlier (Portin et al.) assistant principals are becoming reluctant to commit to more time away from their families.

In addition, 20% of participants said that conflicting expectations from various federal, state, and community agencies create stress and burnout. Calabrese (1991) and

Frazier (2002) suggested that assistant principal jobs should be more diverse and encompass more than just the discipline and enforcement components of administrative duties in order to provide enough satisfaction for assistants to continue in their jobs or move into the principalship.

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

The information garnered from this study indicates that several stakeholders can provide improvements needed to avert the impending staffing crisis in education: university training programs, school boards, and the prospective administrators themselves. There should be two goals of any administrative training program. The first is to train prospective administrators in preparation for the possibility of becoming a principal. The second is to prepare those individuals for the initial step of becoming an assistant principal. Further, there should in these training programs a clear communication of the fact that not everyone will become a principal and that being an assistant principal is a worthy goal in itself.

In order to do that, university training programs can include instruction on all of the types of tasks that assistant principals can be assigned to do. Since every principal must pass through the position of assistant principal, some orientation to that job may provide a smoother transition. This instruction can take place within the current leadership program in a single course. It is also important, though, to foster the idea that doing the assistant principal's job does not have to be a transient experience. There are administrators who enjoy the more intense interaction with students that an assistant's job affords them. There are those who do not wish to commit the time required to be a

principal. Whatever reason compels those individuals to remain assistants, it is important to train them appropriately and confer respect to that career choice.

The result of having assistants who enjoy their jobs because they are prepared for it and principals who have served an apprenticeship as an assistant may be that they can work together better as a team. This is another place that a university training program can provide instruction for aspiring assistants and principals. Learning team strategies before entering a job can help administrators maximize their various talents and skills by working as a team. Also providing some shadowing experiences during preservice training with experienced principals and assistant principals might illuminate the true nature of an administrative position.

Once administrators are in place as an assistant principal, local school boards can alleviate some of the ambiguity and conflict inherent in the education profession by mandating a year-long formal mentoring program with someone with whom the mentee has regular contact, not someone the mentee just sees at monthly meetings. The focus should be on opportunities for dialogue and advisement on daily situations assistants face.

School boards can also design job descriptions for assistants that provide a variety of experiences and still allow them to specialize in areas such as discipline and attendance. Ensuring that all assistants spend time in classrooms working with a variety of students and teachers makes the job more palatable as well as providing more curricular experience to help prepare for a principalship if that is what is desired.

Another task for school boards is to initiate an administrator recruitment program that seeks out young teachers with initiative, strong work ethic, organization, and good

communication skills. Those young teachers can then be groomed to eventually enter a university training program for administrators.

Prospective administrators themselves can actively seek support and mentorship from administrators already in position. They can form informal or formal organizations to foster growth and development and networking amongst those with common interests in order to probe ways to prepare for future jobs as administrators.

Recommendations

1. Further study of assistant principals by surveying their perceived needs for remaining in the assistanceship or moving to the principalship is recommended. More specific information would be helpful for the recruitment and retention of assistants. A qualitative study that interviewed assistant principals about their thoughts and principals about what they feel helped or hindered them in their career would clarify in greater detail what factors need to be addressed in order to avert a crisis.

2. A study using exit interviews for administrators leaving their position for reasons other than retirement would provide additional insights into weaknesses in the administrative hiring and retention system.

3. Exploration of other factors that might play a role such as: (a) urban, suburban, and rural settings; (b) level of education (Masters vs. Doctorate); (c) number of years in the classroom before becoming an administrator; or (d) training in team management and leadership might provide more specific assistance in recruitment and retention of assistants.

4. Active recruitment programs designed to encourage and train younger assistant principals may broaden the pool of potential applicants for administrative jobs.

5. Studies on the feasibility of hiring managers (not necessarily educators) to run the business part of schools. Principals and assistant principals would have the time to focus on instructional leadership, thereby reducing some of the time issues and, consequently, stress issues.

6. A study on the amount of paperwork and recordkeeping that is done by administrators but could be done by clerical staff might provide information that would guide school staffing for the most efficient use of administrator time.

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Appendix A

Open-ended Question Responses Ranked by Frequency

Items ranked according to number of responses are as follows:

Retirement/age	47
Support from friends, colleagues, mentors	45
Confidence in ability/desire to lead	43
Family concerns	42
District issues (politics, budget cuts, communications, bureaucracy)	40
Job complexity/understaffing/stress/burnout	32
Work conditions (responsibilities, school size & location, student age)	24
State and federal issues (NCLB)	23
Money/pay	21
Desire to help students	20
Continuing education/staff development	20
Time	18
Right job/available opening	12
Likes job/education	11
Society and parents/public scrutiny/lack of appreciation	10
Importance of shared responsibilities	9
Personal circumstances	8
Health/fatigue	6
Personality conflicts/different views	6

Need for instructional leaders	5
Coaching/Athletic Director responsibilities	5
Need for change	5
Desire to remain in district	4
Personal faith	3
Personal goals	3
Special education/inclusion	2
Sex	2
Quality of life	2
Desire to work with teachers	2

Items only mentioned by one respondent were not included in this tally.

Appendix B

Correlations of all Variables with Career Plans

Variables	Correlation Coefficients
Age	.447**
Sex	.003
Years in Education	.436**
Admin. Experience	.365**
Admin. Process	-.120*
Mentor	.171**
Conflict 1	-.036
Conflict 2	-.100*
Conflict 3	-.113*
Conflict 4	.025
Conflict 5	.001
Conflict 6	.046
Conflict 7	-.079
Conflict 8	-.107*
Total Conflict	-.059
Ambiguity 9	.068
Ambiguity 10	-.026
Ambiguity 11	-.069
Ambiguity 12	.011
Ambiguity 13	.039
Ambiguity 14	.051

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Appendix C

Participants in Pilot Study

Chet Adkins, Assistant Principal
    Sissonville High School
    Sissonville, West Virginia

Nancy Alexander, Assistant Principal
    Riverside High School
    Belle, West Virginia

Ed Durham, Curriculum Specialist
    Alternative Education
    Kanawha County Schools
    Charleston, West Virginia

Judy Gillian, Curriculum Specialist
    Kanawha County Schools
    Charleston, West Virginia

Dana Humphreys, Assistant Principal
    Herbert Hoover High School
    Elkview, West Virginia

Christina Michaels, Assistant Principal
    George Washington High School
    Charleston, West Virginia

Margaret Miller, Curriculum Specialist
    Kanawha County Schools
    Charleston, West Virginia

Rosalie Rhodes, Curriculum Specialist
    Kanawha County Schools
    Charleston, West Virginia

Olivia Teel, Curriculum Specialist
    Kanawha County Schools
    Charleston, West Virginia

Stephanie Workman, Assistant Principal
    Capital High School
    Charleston, West Virginia

Appendix D

IRB Approval Letter

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board

Tuesday, December 18, 2003

Michael Cunningham
Education
MU Grad. School

RE: IRB Study # 3022   At: Marshall IRB 2

Dear Dr. Cunningham:
Protocol Title:
Factors That Influence the Career Decisions of Assistant Professors

1 am granting expedited approval to the above minimal risk study in accordance with 45 CFR 48.110 for
the period of 1 year. A progress report of the study will be due prior to the anniversary
date of December 18, 2004.

Respectfully yours,

Stephen D. Cooper. Ph.D.
Marshall University IRB #2 Chairperson

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Appendix E

Initial Letter to Participants

Graduate College
School of Education & Professional
Development
Leadership Studies

January, 2004

Dear Secondary Assistant Principal:

I would appreciate your assistance with this research project on identifying the factors that will encourage qualified individuals to become administrators and to remain administrators. Since the assistant principalship traditionally has been a stepping stone to the principalship, I am gathering information from a selected sample of assistant principals who are members of NASSP. The results of this research will be used in my dissertation at Marshall University. This research will help me understand how the profession might address the imminent shortage of school administrators in our nation.

All you need to do is complete this short questionnaire which should take approximately 10 minutes. If you do not wish to participate, simply discard the questionnaire. Responses will be completely anonymous; your name will not appear anywhere on the survey. Completing and returning the questionnaire constitutes your consent to participate.

Keep this letter for your records. If you have any questions regarding the research, contact my chair, Dr. Michael Cunningham in the Leadership Studies Program at Marshall University by calling 800 642-9842 ext. 1912 or by e-mail to mcunningham@marshall.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Integrity at Marshall University at 696-7320. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mary Lu MacCorkle
Assistant Principal
Nitro High School

Appendix F

Follow-up Letter to Participants

Graduate College School of Education & Professional Development Leadership Studies

Date:

Dear Colleague:

You recently received a copy of a survey that I am using to gather information for my doctoral dissertation on the very important topic of administrator development and retention. If you have already responded, please disregard this letter and dispose of the survey.

If not, please take a few minutes and fill out the survey now. I know that you are very busy and have many high priority issues to deal with on a daily basis, but I believe that this information will benefit our profession and education in general. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Mary Lu MacCorkle
Assistant Principal
Nitro High School

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Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey

1. Age?_____   2. Sex? F___ M___   3. Total years in education?____   4. Years as an administrator?_____

A. Career Plans (Mark one with a check) Within the next 5 to 10 years I plan to:
  1. Become a principal_____
  2. Remain an assistant _____
  3. Leave administration and stay in education_____
  4. Leave education all together_____
  5. Other_____

B. Administrative Team (which statement best describes the administrative process at your school)
  1. The principal makes all decisions and the assistant(s) are delegated tasks_____ (hierarchy)
  2. The principal has primary responsibility for decision making, but consults with the assistant(s) about their specific tasks_____(shared hierarchy)
  3. The principal assigns the assistants specific tasks for which they are completely responsible _____ (partial teaming)
  4. The principal and assistant principals share decision-making on most tasks____ (administrative team)

C. Mentor Program: Did you participate in any sort of mentor program either prior to or just after becoming an administrator? _____
  If you answered yes, which best describes the kind of program you were involved in:
  1. Formal district sponsored mentor program _____
  2. Formal preservice mentor program during administrative training _____
  3. Informal mentoring within a district either while striving to become an administrator or after becoming one _____
  4. Informal mentoring during your first administrative assignment within your school _____
  Approximately what was the duration of your involvement in the mentor program?_____

D. Please rank the following items on a 1 to 4 scale by circling the number—1 being Agree and 4 being Disagree
  1. I have to do tasks that should be done differently

     Agree   Slightly Agree   Slightly Disagree   Disagree
      1   2   3   4

  2. I receive an assignment without the manpower to complete it
      1   2   3   4

  3. I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment
      1   2   3   4

  4. I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently
      1   2   3   4

  5. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people
      1   2   3   4

  6. I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others
      1   2   3   4

  7. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it

1   2   3   4

        8. I work on unnecessary tasks
            1   2   3   4

    F. Please rank the following items on a 1 to 4 scale by circling the number—1 being Agree and 4
    being Disagree
        9. I feel certain about how much authority I have
            Agree   Slightly Agree   Slightly Disagree   Disagree
            1   2   3   4

        10. Clear, planned goals and objectives exist for my job
            1   2   3   4

        11. I know that I have divided my time properly
            1   2   3   4

        12. I know what my responsibilities are
            1   2   3   4

        13. I know exactly what is expected of me
            1   2   3   4

        14. Explanation is clear of what has to be done
            1   2   3   4

G. What factors other that role ambiguity, role conflict, participation on an administrative team, and
participation in a mentor program might have had an effect on your future career plans?

The 8 questions on role conflict and the 6 questions on role ambiguity are from Rizzo, J.; House, R.; and
Lirtzman, S. (1970). Role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations. *Administrative Science
Quarterly*, 15, 150-163.

<div align="center">VITA

MARY LU MACCORKLE

mlmaccorkle@juno.com</div>

EDUCATION

Marshall University Doctoral Program
> Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, 2004

Marshall University College of Graduate Studies
> Master of Arts, Leadership Studies, 1997

West Virginia College of Graduate Studies
> Master of Arts, Reading, 1977

Morris Harvey College
> Bachelor of Arts, Language Arts, 1972

CERTIFICATION

State of West Virginia, Secondary Teacher, 7-12, Permanent
> Specializations: Language Arts, Reading, Gifted

State of West Virginia, Secondary School Administrator, Permanent

State of West Virginia, Superintendent, Permanent

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1998-Present	Assistant Principal, Nitro High School, Nitro, West Virginia
1986-1998	Teacher, Nitro High School
1983-1986	Teacher, First Presbyterian Church Pre-School
1976-1979	Teacher, Clendenin Junior High School
1973-1975	Teacher, Spring Hill Junior High School
1972-1973	Substitute Teacher, Kanawha County Schools