

ScholarWorks@GSU

Supporting School Leaders: A Case Study to Explore Leadership Development Through the Lens of Adult Learning Theory

Authors	Douglas, Jenny
Citation	Douglas, Jenny. "Supporting School Leaders: A Case Study to Explore Leadership Development Through the Lens of Adult Learning Theory." Georgia State University, 2024. https://doi.org/10.57709/36942397
DOI	https://doi.org/10.57709/36942397
Download date	2026-04-10 08:27:04
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14694/5769

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, SUPPORTING SCHOOL LEADERS: A CASE STUDY TO EXPLORE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF ADULT LEARNING THEORY, by JENNY DOUGLAS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Education, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

Nicholas J. Sauer, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

Susan Ogletree, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Will Rumbaugh, Ed.D.
Committee Member

Date

Jennifer Esposito, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Department of Educational Policy Studies

Paul Alberto, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education & Human Development

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

By presenting this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the advanced degree from Georgia State University, I agree that the library of Georgia State University shall make it available for inspection and circulation in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I agree that permission to quote, to copy from, or to publish this dissertation may be granted by the professor under whose direction it was written, by the College of Education & Human Development's Director of Graduate Studies, or by me. Such quoting, copying, or publishing must be solely for scholarly purposes and will not involve potential financial gain. It is understood that any copying from or publication of this dissertation which involves potential financial gain will not be allowed without my written permission.

JENNY DOUGLAS

NOTICE TO BORROWERS

All dissertations deposited in the Georgia State University library must be used in accordance with the stipulations prescribed by the author in the preceding statement. The author of this dissertation is:

Jenny Kathleen Douglas
Department of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education & Human Development
Georgia State University

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Nicholas J. Sauers
Department of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education & Human Development
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303

CURRICULUM VITAE

Jenny Douglas

ADDRESS: 507 Windward Way
Woodstock, Georgia 30189

EDUCATION:

Ed.D.	2024	Georgia State University Educational Policy Studies
Ed.S.	2011	Georgia State University Educational Policy Studies
Masters Degree	1998	Troy University Elementary Education
Bachelors Degree	1996	Troy University Elementary Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2012 - Present	Principal Cobb County School District
2007-2012	Assistant Principal Cobb County School District
2006-2007	Area Lead Teacher Cobb County School District
1999-2006	Teacher Cobb County School District

SUPPORTING SCHOOL LEADERS: A CASE STUDY TO EXPLORE LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF ADULT LEARNING THEORY

by

JENNY DOUGLAS

Under the Direction of Nicholas J. Sauer, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The role of the school leader is critical to school success and has been identified as second in impact only to the classroom teacher. School leaders face many challenges in this role, including stakeholder concerns, instructional leadership issues, and difficulties balancing work and personal life due to stress and excessive work hours. These concerns, combined with a lack of ongoing support, can lead to issues of burnout and turnover. These issues have a negative impact on schools and create concerns with maintaining an adequate supply of school leaders. Guided by three research questions, purposive sampling was utilized to select a leadership development program for aspiring principals in a large suburban school district in the southeast.

A qualitative, single case study was conducted framed by Malcolm Knowles' (2005) six assumptions of the andragogical adult learning theory model. Nine participants from the 2022-2023 leadership development program were interviewed and document analysis was conducted. Virtual, semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed through NVivo transcription, followed by open, axial, and selective coding data analysis. Through this process, three themes emerged: building a collegial network, developing knowledge, and contributing to self-growth. This study highlights school and district leadership's critical role in developing and supporting the next generation of educational leaders.

INDEX WORDS: Adult learning theory, Assistant principals, Leadership development, Principals, Principal pipeline, School leadership

SUPPORTING SCHOOL LEADERS: A CASE STUDY TO EXPLORE LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF ADULT LEARNING THEORY

by

JENNY DOUGLAS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

in

Educational Policy Studies

in

the College of Education & Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2024

Copyright by
Jenny K. Douglas
2024

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people at Georgia State who have been instrumental in this process. Thank you, Dr. Sauers, for serving as my chair. Your support began with my readmission and continued throughout my coursework and dissertation. I appreciate your feedback and your encouragement. Thank you to my committee, Dr. Ogletree and Dr. Rumbaugh, for your thoughtful feedback and for helping me to expand my thinking. Thank you Dr. Moss for getting Cohort X started. Thank you, Dr. Jami Berry and Dr. James Kahrs, for getting me started on this path. Cohort X! I am proud to have done this journey with you.

I am so appreciative of the time, honesty, and insights given by the participants of this study. Thank you for letting me tell your stories. Thank you to my incredible work family. I appreciate your patience and grace when I was pulled in a million directions.

To my mom and my daughters: You are the strongest women I know. Your strength gave me strength. From creating a beautiful office space for me to work to dropping off meals on my writing days, I couldn't have done this without you.

#0712

#12

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
1 THE PROBLEM.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose	6
Research Questions.....	7
Significance of the Study	7
Assumptions and Limitations	8
Delimitations	9
Overview of the Study	9
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	11
Challenges of School Leadership.....	12
Burnout, Retention, and Turnover	18
School Leadership Development	21
Theoretical Framework.....	27
Conclusion	36
3 METHODOLOGY	38
Research Design	38
Sample.....	39
Data Collection.....	46
Data Analysis.....	52
Data Management.....	55
Trustworthiness	55
Conclusion	56
4 RESULTS	58
Building a Collegial Network.....	60
Developing Knowledge	68
Contributing to Self-Concept.....	82
Conclusion	89
5 DISCUSSION	91
Major Themes	92
Implications	107

Suggestions for Further Research	109
Conclusion	110
REFERENCES	114
APPENDICES	125

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Six Assumptions of the Andragogical Model.....	31
Table 2: Participant Profile.....	45
Table 3: Document Analysis.....	48
Table 4: Key Findings Connections.....	92

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Diagram of Themes and Categories.....59

1 THE PROBLEM

The life of a new principal has been described as a “reality shock” (Spillane & Lee, 2013, p. 347), while the move into the assistant principal role has been called a “culture shock” (Craft et al., 2016, p. 11) with many new leaders experiencing feelings of isolation and loneliness (Hayes, 2019; Slater et al., 2018; Versland, 2018). The responsibilities of school leaders seem never-ending. The demands placed on principals continue to expand yearly due to new government initiatives and ever-increasing levels of accountability (Hayes, 2019; Ng & Szeto, 2015; Slater et al., 2018). According to Burkett (2021), “The workload of campus leaders continues to increase with new expectations for evaluation and supervision, changing legislative mandates, and mounting pressures for improved school accountability” (p. 1). Additionally, school leaders are charged with ensuring equitable outcomes for all students, improving the efficiency of the school, and ensuring students are prepared for the challenges of college and career options after graduation (Morgan, 2018) while providing a positive culture and climate and ensuring the best hiring decisions are made to ensure the effectiveness of the school (Yavuz & Robinson, 2018).

School leaders in today’s educational landscape face many challenges. Based on a review of the literature, challenges are encountered in the areas of building relationships, dealing with challenging staff, community relationships, excessive workload, constant change, lack of authority and autonomy, inadequate staffing and funding, accountability pressures, operational management, and isolation (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fuller & Young, 2009; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Wang, 2022). The cumulative effect of these many challenges results in a working environment for principals that can be highly stressful (Beam et al., 2016; Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Versland, 2018). Shoho and Barnett (2010) interviewed 62 new principals and

found that most were surprised by the emotional energy required for the principalship. Similarly, Gentilucci et al. (2018) found through inductive, respondent-driven interviews that beginning principals did not expect such a high stress level. Crawford and Cowie's (2011) Scottish study also found that new principals described the stress as unrelenting pressures of their new position.

The emotional pressures and stress experienced by beginning principals can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Bauer & Silver, 2017; Slater et al., 2018). Hayes' 2019 study focusing on principal mentoring found the impact of accountability pressures from both the state and federal levels, among other job demands, which resulted in new principals experiencing loneliness. Similarly, "being an assistant principal can often feel like being stranded on a deserted island" (Burkett, 2021, p. 12). Versland (2016) examined principal induction programs through qualitative interviews and found isolation a common concern among participants due to a lack of local school district support.

Difficulty in establishing and maintaining relationships is a common theme in the related literature (Bayar, 2016; Duncan et al., 2011; Wang, 2022). Principals must build effective relationships with all stakeholders, including students, staff, families, and the community. Similar needs are relevant to the assistant principal role, including building relationships with staff, communicating with stakeholders, and making decisions (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Duncan, Range, and Scherz's 2011 research involving 106 new principals in Wyoming identified dealing with difficult parents as a significant concern. Similarly, Bayar's (2016) semi-structured interviews with 14 new principals also identified dealing with families as a significant concern. In contrast, Clarke et al. (2011) surveyed 45 western Australian principals who indicated that parents were among the least of their concerns.

Unfortunately, the concerns for beginning principals start before they assume the role due to various issues, including lack of preparation (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Levin & Bradley, 2019). “The assistant principalship often does not prepare someone to assume the principalship” (Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 265). Duncan et al. (2011) identified concerns with principal preparation programs to be common among study participants. Similar challenges continue for beginning principals as they feel a lack of support from their employing districts and, as such, are left to form informal support networks on their own (Beam et al., 2016; Fuller & Young, 2009; Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Versland, 2018). When combined with the everyday pressures of the job, difficulties in building and maintaining relationships, a lack of adequate preparation, and ongoing issues of support, many principals indicate a high likelihood of leaving the profession (Bayar, 2016; Fuller & Young, 2009; Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2019; Levin & Bradley, 2019). Shoho and Barnett (2010) found among 62 new principal participants that most plan to serve as local school principals for less than 10 years before moving on to district-level positions or retirement.

As previously found in multiple studies (Beam et al., 2016; Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Versland, 2018), the lack of ongoing support for beginning principals has consistently been a significant concern. Almost 97% of Duncan and Stock’s (2010) study participants believed in the power of mentoring to support them in their new role as principals. Even when a mentor or coach is assigned, school leaders feel more time dedicated to that relationship would be beneficial, according to a study of 26 mid-career assistant principals (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Research in the United States and internationally has identified the critical role principal induction programs could play in supporting beginning administrators (Bertrand, 2018; Crawford & Cowie, 2011).

Multiple models of principal induction through mentoring exist, including internal and external mentoring (Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015), relational mentoring (Hayes, 2019), and state-mandated, long-term mentoring programs (Gimbel, 2018). Hayes and Burkett (2021) explored a school district-university partnership to support mid-career assistant principals integrating peer mentoring and a coaching component. Burkett (2021) recommends utilizing principals as mentors for assistant principals. While there are qualitative and quantitative studies examining mentorship for school leaders, the literature becomes extremely limited in identifying other induction program components that could benefit new administrators.

The International Study of Principal Preparation has conducted multiple studies in various countries worldwide. Slater et al. (2018) conducted research as part of the ISPP and identified the use of teaching cases to assist in principal induction. Another unique opportunity beyond mentoring is the use of interactive problem-solving to enhance the real-world skills of beginning administrators. Hayes and Burkett (2021) recommend a development program for assistant principals, including monthly expert presentations, field-based experiences, and small group networks. Bravender and Staub's (2018) quantitative study included 15 beginning principals in the United States to examine the benefits of interactive problem-solving.

Hayes (2019) found that observations, attendance at data meetings, and local school learning walks were helpful for induction phase administrators. Similarly, networking, guest speakers, and group role play were identified in Eller's (2014) research by 16 beginning principals in Virginia as helpful for their performance. Taylor Backor and Gordon (2015) identified networking, cohort support groups, and ongoing professional development as essential induction activities. The induction activities in these studies are directly related to the day-to-day

work and mimic often-faced scenarios in the life of a new administrator. These activities have job relevance.

Statement of the Problem

The lack of educators seeking the principalship, causing rising shortages across the United States, is not a new issue (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Levin & Bradley, 2019). This dearth in the principal pipeline is caused by many factors, including lack of appeal of the principalship, high rates of turnover, early retirement, and teacher leaders and assistant principals not seeking the position (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fuller & Young, 2009; Wang, 2022). Even when assistant principals seek the principalship, they are often unprepared for the role (Morgan, 2018), possessing a low level of preparedness in areas critical to school leadership success (Yavuz & Robinson, 2018). These factors combine to create issues of turnover.

According to Levin & Bradley (2019), the national average for principal tenure was only four years for the school year 2016-2017. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education reported in 2014 that only 49% of Georgia principals were still in a principalship after five years. Versland (2018) reports a principal shortage crisis in both quantity and quality.

Issues contributing to the lack of quality candidates for the principalship include poor preparation in higher education programs (Duncan et al., 2011) and lack of support during assistant principal tenure focused on preparing for the principalship (Gates et al., 2019). Duncan et al. found that the most extensive deficits in principal preparation included staff issues, student discipline, data analysis, and dealing with parents. Assistant principals feel especially underprepared in budget and finance, legal and ethical issues related to technology, and recruitment and retention of staff decisions (Yavuz & Robinson, 2018). In DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran's 2003 study examining the conditions and challenges of K-12 principals, 86% of beginning principal respondents reported that their experience as a teacher helped

prepare them for the principalship while only 71% reported their role as an assistant principal had value. Gates et al. (2019) claim that preparation and development programs for assistant principals are critical in establishing and maintaining a quality principal pipeline. Beginning principals who felt prepared for the principalship through in-service opportunities, advanced degrees, mentors, and internships reported lower levels of stress and increased intentions of remaining in the principalship (Levin & Bradley, 2019). This study concluded that quality preparation and ongoing support built leadership capacity and reduced turnover.

Crawford and Cowie (2011) and Gentilucci (2013) purport that in addition to not being prepared for the position, beginning principals did not expect the extent of the job pressures and stress they would face. Fuller and Young (2009) found that overall student achievement in a school also had a high impact on principal stress and retention, even during the first year, with higher-performing schools able to sustain better retention rates. Ten years later, Levin and Bradley (2019) reported that 35% of principals remain in the position for two years or less, with the highest turnover rates occurring in lower-performing schools. In addition to the overwhelming issues first-year principals face, isolation and loneliness also impact a leader's interest in remaining in the position (Hayes, 2019; Slater et al., 2018; Bauer & Silver, 2017). The researchers also found that isolation is a reliable predictor of job satisfaction.

The school leadership pipeline is experiencing gaps in the quantity of principal candidates. When candidates do assume the role, gaps in quality exist due to concerns with levels of preparedness for the principalship. Additionally, the overwhelming nature of being a novice principal can contribute to burnout and turnover. Districts must take responsibility for preparing leaders for the challenges of the principalship and extend professional development into the assistant principal role (Hayes & Burkett, 2021).

Purpose

Principals have been found to impact school climate, determine the environment that retains teachers, and increase teacher leadership (Georgia Partnership for Excellence, 2019). “Education research has established a significant relationship between school leadership and students’ achievement” (Morgan, 2018, p. 1). Research has claimed a direct link between principal functions and student achievement due to the role of principals as a change agent (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Good preparation for a school leadership role, ongoing training after assuming the role, and coaching support, contribute to building leadership capacity and reducing principal turnover (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Unfortunately, many school leaders report inadequate preparation and professional development (Levin & Bradley). This qualitative case study examines influential practices within a leadership development program. A lens of adult learning theory is utilized.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study explores the following research questions:

1. How are the principles of adult learning theory applied in a leadership development program?
2. How does participation in a leadership development program influence administrator practice?
3. Which leadership development program components influence participants’ perceptions of preparedness?

Significance of the Study

This study may be significant to aspiring and novice school leaders and coordinators of leadership development programs. Quality leadership development programs could help address

the school leadership shortage and increase the retention of effective leaders. The study may add to the body of literature regarding aspiring principal induction programs.

Assumptions and Limitations

Several assumptions inherent in qualitative research are foundational to this case study. Reality depends on the social context and the experiences of individuals versus a single fixed reality (Merriam, 2002), which will influence program participants' perceptions and limit the study's generalizability. This case study aims to understand the perspectives of the individual participants.

An interpretive theoretical paradigm was utilized, which assumes the researcher will construct meaning from the participants' experiences, resulting in knowledge developed within the relationship between the participant and researcher (Hays & Singh, 2012). The relationship between the researcher and participants in qualitative case study is interactive and influential (Stake, 1995). A well-developed relationship between the researcher and participants can lend credibility to a qualitative case study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Qualitative research is subjective, and the researcher's values influence the interpretation of the data (Stake, 1995). I must disclose that I have a personal relationship with the district. In following the research traditions of qualitative case study, I will be an integral part of the research and, therefore, must acknowledge personal bias as a study limitation (Hays & Singh, 2012). In addition to researcher bias, there is the influence of participant bias due to the subjective nature of self-reporting experiences through interviews. The small sample size for the study aligns with the structure of a qualitative case study. However, it results in a context-specific and not generalizable study, which is a methodological limitation. Other limitations, such as the willingness of the identified sample to participate in order to maximize diversity of perspectives, arose during the study.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to examining one aspiring principal induction program in a large, suburban public school district. The selection of this case follows established case study methods that support establishing boundaries for a case to allow for in-depth examination of a particular case (Hays & Singh, 2012; Stake, 1995). The additional researcher established delimitations are the research timeframe and the selection of research questions. The timeframe established for the completion of the research is necessary and unavoidable. The selection of research questions to exclude other research interests is based on reviewing the literature and identifying research objectives.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative case study examined one suburban aspiring principal leadership development program from the lens of adult learning theory while identifying influential program components and their impact on leadership practice. In the model of Merriam (1998), A theoretical framework derived from a review of the relevant literature has been developed to guide the research questions and methodology selection.

The research employed a bound case study method in the Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) models. Employing the Stake case study model will allow for fully exploring the specific case. Participants included elementary, middle, and high school assistant principals who recently participated in an aspiring principals program. Including participants from various K-12 models developed a rich narrative of the case that includes multiple perspectives, which is critical in qualitative research (Schwandt et al., 2007). Semi-structured interviews and document reviews were utilized to collect data. Informal data analysis began during the semi-structured interviews, followed by formal data analysis to identify patterns and themes. Data was analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding (Williams & Moser, 2019). Understanding that qualitative data

analysis is cyclical and iterative (Hays & Singh, 2012), coding occurred in several rounds using researcher coding and analysis software.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review, which examines peer-reviewed journal articles and empirical studies from the United States and internationally. The majority of the included literature was published within the last 12 years. Seminal works to support adult learning theory have been included due to their prominence in the field, which dates back to 1980.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Effective school leadership has been described as vital (Marzano, 2005) and the cornerstone of a well-performing school (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). According to Day et al. (n.d.), “School leaders are a critical determinant in the quality of the psychological, physical, and social environments and conditions in which teaching and learning take place” (p. 25). Effective leadership is a determining factor in improving student achievement according to Yavuz and Robinson (2018). School leadership has also been identified as “one of the fundamental elements that influence school effectiveness” (Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 264). While there are many positive attributes associated with the impactful role of being a school leader, including rewarding relationships with students and staff (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003) and a sense of fulfillment (Bauer & Silver, 2017), the challenges of the role are abundant. Local school leaders are expected to no longer reside in the realm of management but to strive to influence the staff and students positively through effective instructional leadership, maintain a positive school climate, and effectively manage the day-to-day operations of the school all while facing ever-increasing accountability pressures to impact student achievement quickly (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Fuller & Young, 2009).

Facing the challenges of becoming a principal is an international concern. Slater et al. (2018) found that regardless of the country or context, principals experienced similar challenges. Clarke et al. (2011), as part of the International Study of Principal Preparation, utilized surveys with 45 new principals from Western Australia to identify the biggest challenges facing today’s school leaders. The ISPP has conducted studies among its 15 participating countries examining the principalship and induction programs. Crawford and Cowie’s (2011) Scotland study, Wildy

et al. (2010) review of practices in Australia and Turkey, and research from Hong Kong (Ng & Szeto, 2016) all focus on the challenges faced by new principals in their respective countries.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the stressors and challenges of school leadership that contribute to issues of burnout and turnover, explore the conditions that lead school leaders to be underprepared and overwhelmed, develop an understanding of support programs for aspiring and beginning principals, and establish the role of adult learning theory.

Challenges of School Leadership

The job of the principal is challenging, which has led to the role being viewed as less appealing (Wang, 2022). Every year, fewer teachers seek to go into local school leadership (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003), and approximately 50% of assistant principals will never assume the principalship (Barnett et al., 2012). The role of the assistant principal has been described as overwhelming and “almost unachievable in daily responsibilities” (Barnett et al., p. 92), and the job of the principal has even been described as impossible (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fuller, 2009). In 2017, Bauer and Silver’s study participants’ perception was that the challenges of the principalship outweigh the benefits. This sentiment can contribute to principal shortages. Fuller (2009) describes the role as “complex, difficult, intense, and extremely stressful” (p. 18). The challenges reported by assistant principals are similar to what principals experience as their role has become more demanding and complicated (Barnett et al.). School leaders face these complex challenges in many areas.

Workload

The overall workload and excessive hours that principals dedicate to the job each week present significant challenges (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2022; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Wang, 2022). Assistant principals also experience issues related to

workload. According to Barnett et al. (2012), of the seven categories of challenges identified by assistant principals, workload was the number one concern with 57% of novice assistant principals. Shoho and Barnett utilized qualitative research involving 62 new principals, and findings revealed that the job was hard to leave behind on evenings and weekends, resulting in a high level of emotional energy being expended. According to DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 84% of principals work more than 50 hours per week, which is an increase of 18% from 1988. Of the 84% who work more than 50 hours per week, one-fourth work 55 to 59 hours, and more than 10% work more than 65 hours per week. Similarly, utilizing the job demands model to examine challenges and job hindrances, Wang (2022) found that principals routinely work over 60 hours per week. Due to excessive work hours, assistant principals experience difficulty balancing personal and work demands (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Barnett et al.). Reducing the number of hours principals work each week can contribute to better working conditions and increased longevity in the role (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Emotional Toll

The emotional toll of school leadership can be high. The increased job demands placed on principals can result in high stress levels, emotional exhaustion, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and difficulty balancing personal and work responsibilities (Bauer & Silver, 2017; Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Fuller & Young, 2009). In Bauer and Silver's examination of first-year principals in the Southeast United States, isolation was found to be the most impactful indicator of the intent of beginning principals to leave their positions (2017). Assistant principals have also reported feeling isolated and lonely due to the change in their social role (Craft et al., 2016). This research found that work friendships are reduced when an educator moves into a leadership role, which takes an emotional toll. Gentilucci et al. (2018) found that new principals

were caught off guard by the stress of their new position. For many principals, “demands overburden personal, professional capacity and affect their performance and well-being” (Wang, 2022, p. 1013). Similarly, assistant principals report feeling an “enormous sense of responsibility, striving for perfection, fearing failure...” (Barnett et al., 2012, p. 106). A stressful job environment, lack of support from employing districts (Beam et al., 2016; Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Versland, 2018), and the many challenges principals face have often exhausted local school leaders.

Decision-Making

School leaders are constantly making decisions, and this authority presents its own set of unique challenges. In a phenomenological study of assistant principals, Craft et al. (2016) found that school leaders lacked confidence in making decisions. A survey administered to 203 first-year K-12 principals revealed that participants experienced a sense of pressure due to being solely responsible for making decisions and school performance (Bauer & Silver, 2017). The study discovered the common perception that principals were forced to make decisions in isolation. Principals feel the weight of ultimate responsibility as final decision-makers (Spillane & Lee, 2013). Although principals expressed concerns about the pressure of making decisions, they were also frustrated with the lack of autonomy to make necessary decisions (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Wang, 2022). According to DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran, 45% of principals in their study were challenged by a lack of authority to make decisions. Decision-making authority is such a critical issue that Levin and Bradley (2019) have suggested that improvement in this area is one of the top five strategies for reducing principal turnover.

Family Relationships

Concerns with building relationships and working with all stakeholders are common themes in much of the research (Bayar, 2016; Duncan et al., 2011; Gentilucci, 2013; Wang, 2022). A specific challenge in building home-school relationships is communication (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Additionally, being sensitive to the cultural differences among families in the school community can be an issue in supporting effective relationships (Duncan & Stock, 2010).

In Duncan et al.'s (2011) research, 106 Wyoming principals identified addressing the concerns of difficult parents as a significant issue for new principals. Conversely, Clarke et al. (2011) studied the perceptions of 45 new Western Australian principals and determined that dealing with difficult parents was one of the least concerning. Although Barnett et al. (2012) found that assistant principals felt prepared to build relationships with families, they were unprepared for the level of conflict and felt unprepared to handle contentious situations. Of the 103 assistant principals in the study, 24% of novice assistant principals and 27% of experienced assistant principals found challenges in dealing with disgruntled parents.

Slater et al. (2018) and Beam et al. (2016) employed surveys and focus groups and consistently found that building credibility in the community was a unique challenge for beginning principals. These researchers attributed some of this difficulty to new principals being compared to the previous school leader (Beam et al.; Slater et al.). Parents can harbor unreasonable demands and be vocal in their criticism of school administration which contributes to high-stress levels for principals (Wang, 2022) and hinders relationship building.

Staff Relationships

Hiring, managing, and building relationships with staff are essential roles of a school leader. However, they do not feel confident in their readiness level in recruiting, selecting, and retaining teaching staff according to Yavuz & Robinson's research with 186 assistant principals (2018). Even when confidence is not an issue, being allowed to make hiring decisions can be a concern. Principals play a "critical role in attracting and retaining qualified teachers" (Levin & Bradley, 2019, p. 18), but often feel they do not have enough authority in making hiring decisions (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Wang, 2022). Only 33% of principals in DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran's study reported having significant input when selecting and hiring their assistant principals.

When examining principal issues related to staff, multiple studies have found dealing with challenging staff to be a concern (Clarke et al., 2011; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Slater et al., 2018) with Ng and Szeto (2015) identifying staff management as an ongoing issue. Resistance to change and principals being compared to previous leadership are two sources of this conflict (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Assistant principals also struggle when addressing contentious issues with staff (Barnett et al., 2012). In the study conducted by Barnett et al., more than one-fourth of assistant principals identified dealing with conflict as the area they were least prepared for, with 30% of beginning and experienced assistant principals claiming difficult teachers to be the most significant conflict. The researchers found, "The types of conflicts mentioned by assistant principals are similar to what new principals experience" (Barnett et al., p. 117). Similarly, Hayes and Burkett (2021) identified working with teachers as an area of great need for assistant principal professional development, while Burkett (2021) found conflict resolution strategies

were a specific area of need. Dealing with administrative tasks and conflicts interferes with school leaders' ability to dedicate time to instructional leadership (Barnett et al.).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is concerned with many areas related to school improvement, including "...promoting better outcomes for students, emphasizing the importance of teaching and learning and enhancing their quality" (Day et al., n.d., p. 18) and is the top priority for 81% of school leaders (Day et al.). Student achievement pressures on schools continue to increase, and as such, all school leaders, including assistant principals, have a role to play as instructional leaders (Barnett et al., 2012). School leaders now spend more time on many areas of instructional leadership, including curriculum, instruction, assessment, student achievement, effective teaching strategies, and special education (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). However, due to the many other demands of the principalship, school leaders often do not have enough time to devote to instructional leadership (Burkett, 2021; Wang, 2022).

Hayes (2019) and Duncan and Stock (2010) revealed that beginning principals are concerned about instructional leadership as their role has shifted from managerial-focused to instruction-focused. According to the Georgia Partnership for Excellence (2019), "School leaders are responsible for all aspects of student learning, both inside and outside of the classroom" (p. 28). The principal's role in instructional leadership has been acknowledged, and principals significantly impact teacher practice (Levin & Bradley, 2019). One role of an instructional leader is to provide professional development for staff. However, many principals need support in this area (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). According to the researchers, 71% of principals in their study identified a need for additional support in providing professional development. Improving skills related to instructional leadership has also been identified as a professional

learning need for assistant principals (Allen & Weaver, 2014). According to Morgan's quantitative study sampling 120 assistant principals, the lowest score related to leader self-efficacy was in instructional leadership (2018).

Operational Issues

Operational and logistical management issues are well documented in the literature as concerns for school leaders. Administrators are consistently concerned about the amount of time spent on administrative, non-instructional tasks, such as the number of emails and the massive quantity of paperwork that must be handled (Beam et al., 2016; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Wang, 2022). Leaders reported frustration in managing meetings, emails, phone calls, and unrealistic deadlines in a study of 103 elementary, middle, and high school assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2012). In addition to managing many operational tasks, a school leader's day is unpredictable. This makes managing the inherent responsibilities logistically challenging (Craft et al., 2016).

Budget and finance issues were also concerns for K-12 principals (Duncan et al., 2011; Ng & Szeto, 2015). In a 2018 study regarding assistant principals' perceptions of preparedness in various leadership tasks, managing a budget was reported as a low level of readiness (Yavuz & Robinson, 2018). Similarly, assistant principals report needing professional development to address organizational skills, especially budget and finance (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Hayes & Burkett, 2021).

Burnout, Retention, and Turnover

The many challenges faced by school leaders contribute to issues with burnout, retention, and turnover. Turnover in school leadership is a nationwide issue, with the national average tenure of a school principal being only four years, with a staggering 35% serving for two years or

less (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Shoho and Barnett's (2010) Texas research and Bayar's (2016) study in Turkey similarly exposed concerns about longevity. Most of the 62 new principals interviewed by Shoho and Barnett planned to remain in the profession for less than ten years before they moved on to a district-level position or retired.

Contributing Factors of Turnover

School characteristics have been found to impact leader turnover, but the personal characteristics of the school leader were found to have a negligible impact (Fuller & Young, 2009). Student achievement has a high impact on the retention of first-year principals, with schools demonstrating higher student achievement having a higher retention rate (Fuller & Young).

The prevalence of poverty within a school is a detriment in the retention of administrators, with high-poverty schools having the shortest average tenure (Fuller & Young, 2009; Levin & Bradley, 2019). A study by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence (2019) reported that 49% of Georgia principals were still in the role after five years, with an annual turnover rate of 19%. For schools with higher levels of poverty, the annual turnover rate was 23%, and high minority schools experienced turnover rates of 22%.

Retention rates vary across K-12 levels. In 2009, Fuller and Young found that high schools had the lowest retention rate, with only 50% remaining in the principalship for three years and 30% remaining for five years. In 2019, Levin and Bradley found that high school leaders were most likely to leave the education profession altogether, while elementary and middle school leaders were more likely to find a different position within the field of education. These studies also found that retention was lower in rural and small-town schools compared to suburban schools.

In addition to school characteristics' impact on retention, school leaders' satisfaction with support and professional development are also factors. Levin and Bradley (2019) found that dissatisfied principals reported a lack of access to professional development, which contributed to their decision to leave the profession. The study also found that school leaders provided with in-service opportunities were more likely to remain in their leadership role; this was especially applicable for leaders serving in more challenging schools if the professional development was specifically targeted to their needs.

Impact of Turnover

High administrative turnover rates have several adverse effects, including finding effective candidates to fill vacancies. Concerns about the principal pipeline have been examined for years (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). This study found that rising shortages of qualified school leaders were an issue across the United States impacted by the early retirement age of many administrators. According to this study, only 4% of school administrators were over 60.

There is also a financial cost to high turnover rates. Fuller and Young (2009) and Levin and Bradley (2019) report significant financial costs related to recruitment, hiring, and training for school administrators. The associated financial implication of turnover can be between \$10,000 and \$50,000 due to a myriad of costs, including the use of personnel resources, supplies such as business cards and letterhead, technology including laptops and cell phones, principal preparation, and professional development expenses (Levin & Bradley).

Effective school leadership is essential to improving student outcomes (Levin & Bradley), as principals play a critical role in school improvement (Fuller & Young, 2009). To effectively impact the school improvement process, school leaders must remain in the position

for five years (Georgia Partnership for Excellence). Academic achievement and school improvement processes are negatively impacted by leader turnover (Georgia Partnership for Excellence, 2019; Levin & Bradley, 2019). The disruption in the school improvement process caused by leadership turnover is incredibly impactful for schools with high poverty rates and lower student achievement (Georgia Partnership for Excellence).

It has been claimed that school leadership is second only to teacher quality in impacting student achievement (Marzano, 2005). With teachers' critical role in student achievement, it is essential to retain highly effective teachers. Higher principal retention rates are linked to higher teacher retention rates (Fuller & Young, 2009; Georgia Partnership for Excellence, 2019). Therefore, it is important to support school leaders in addressing the many challenges of the role to reduce burnout issues and improve retention rates.

School Leadership Development

Leadership studies spanning the last twenty years have documented school leaders' concerns with a lack of support (Crawford & Cowie, 2011; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fuller & Young, 2009; Wang, 2022). While concerns with district support are common, Fuller and Young found urban schools had higher rates of school leadership dissatisfaction with support. Among DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran's study participants, only 11.7% of administrators categorized their satisfaction with district support as very satisfied, 29.9% were dissatisfied, and 7.4% were very dissatisfied. Assistant principals also seek additional professional development and have reported that development for their specific leadership role is "never offered or mandated by their district" (Hayes & Burkett, 2021, p. 513). Fuller and Young asserted that today's principals assume more roles and job responsibilities, but the "level of support is no different than 10, 20, or even 50 years ago" (p. 18).

Professional Development Needs

School leaders need continued professional development in many areas. One of the most significant areas is instructional leadership. Duncan and Stock (2010) identified instructional leadership as a critical challenge for new principals. Similarly, assistant principals express this need to further develop their skills with instructional leadership (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Barnett et al., 2012; Burkett, 2021). Taylor Backor and Gordon (2015) identified specific induction program components to support beginning principals in developing effective instructional leadership skills. Versland (2018) found through interviewing over 250 new principals that mentors were identified as effective if they focused on instructional leadership. According to Oleszewski et al. (2012), "...schools require a new generation of leaders who can transform schools and provide instructional leadership unlike previous generations" (p. 264).

Professional development needs go beyond application of knowledge in areas such as instructional leadership to include people skills. Gentilucci et al. (2013) utilized a qualitative study with new principals in California utilizing respondent-driven interviews to examine principal induction programs. One of the significant findings identified the need for beginning principals to learn soft skills such as active listening and building trust. Similarly, Hayes and Burkett (2021) identified the area of communication as a professional development need through a study that sampled 26 experienced assistant principals. Giving feedback to teachers was one area of communication in which these school leaders reported needing additional development. Focusing on having "critical conversations" with staff is a beneficial area of professional learning (Burkett, 2021, p. 11).

Providing Support - Mentoring

Much of the domestic and international research focuses on mentoring as the main, or only, component of new school leader induction programs. Ng (2016), through qualitative research, identified the value of mentor-mentee meetings based on participant questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Significant findings showed that new principals place a high value on learning from a veteran principal.

Hayes (2019) describes a particular type of mentoring relationship by examining the results of a qualitative, single-site case study. Focus groups and participant interviews were utilized along with observations, which found that mentoring is crucial in supporting novice principals, mainly if the mentoring is relational. Hayes describes relational mentoring as focusing on a mutually beneficial relationship in which the mentor and mentee principals learn from each other. When effectively implemented, relational mentoring is especially helpful in building instructional leadership practices for beginning principals. As previously noted, instructional leadership is a significant need for school leaders (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Ducan & Stock, 2010). Morgan (2018) recommends that mentors and new school leaders work collaboratively to identify strengths and build plans to address areas of need. Hayes and Burkett (2021) call for the development of “pervasive mentoring relationships” (p. 502).

Through in-depth interviews, Taylor Backor and Gordon (2015) collected feedback from professors, principals, and teacher leaders. The study utilized 15 participants in Texas to examine mentoring practices. Results found a need for internal and external mentoring. Internal mentors from university preparation programs and employing school districts and external mentors such as retired administrators were recommended. Similarly, Bertrand et al. (2018) identified the need for internal and external mentor-mentee relationships. Multiple studies also support the

advantages of assigning veteran principals as mentors to new and assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2012; Craft et al., 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Duncan and Stock (2010) studied the perceptions of 187 rural Wyoming principals. Surveys indicated that almost 97% believed mentoring was extremely important to positively impact beginning principal effectiveness. However, only 13% of study participants participated in a formal mentoring program. School leaders tend to form informal networking and support groups when there is a lack of opportunities and access to formal mentoring support (Beam et al., 2016; Craft et al., 2016; Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Duncan & Stock). These small support groups allow for peer mentoring (Burkett, 2021) but lack the structure and training of formal mentoring programs.

Characteristics of Mentors

Gimbel (2018) utilized a phenomenological methodology to examine a state-legislated two-year mentoring program. This small study included semi-structured interviews with four mentor/mentee partnerships. One of the most critical findings in Gimbel's study was describing the mentor as someone who asks questions but is not necessarily the giver of advice. This mentor/mentee structure allows new principals to talk through real-world decisions and to think deeply about alternatives and implications. Schechter (2014) interviewed 18 new principals to examine the characteristics they perceived as essential to mentoring effectiveness. The resulting data identified the specific traits of respect, admiration, openness, honesty, trust, and sincerity. Additionally, Versland (2018) and Bertrand (2018) found that relevant work experience was a mentor characteristic that helped to build a connection between the mentor and mentee and was determined to be an essential component.

Providing Support – Coaching

Coaching is an additional tool for professional support for school leaders. In examining a university-district collaborative professional development program, the coaching component was viewed by many participants as the most valuable strategy in the program (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). According to this study, coaches play a different role than mentors in supporting school leaders. These coaches conducted observations and provided feedback, which is not a typical tool mentors use. The coaches also utilized goal setting, practice, and reflection, which resulted in all of the program participants wanting more time with their coach due to the positive impact of the relationship.

In a study of 30 school leaders based on observations and interviews, coaching was utilized to integrate knowledge development with opportunities to apply new understandings (Nicolaidou et al., 2016). This feedback-based model included group and individual coaching sessions based on individualized needs identified through a self-assessment. Findings reported that this model positively impacted goal setting, assistance in implementing professional development plans, and reflection on personal practice.

Beyond Mentoring and Coaching

While much of the research focuses on mentoring as induction support for school leaders, the existing body of research does examine other induction program components, specifically strategies directly related to their actual work. Slater et al. (2018) conducted research as part of the International Study of Principal Preparation, which suggested utilizing real teaching cases to help new principals prepare for challenges they may face in the future. In a study involving 103 assistant principals in Texas, findings recommended providing opportunities for field experiences and aligning leadership development activities to actual job responsibilities (Barnett

et al., 2012). Similarly, Bravender and Staub (2018) examined the potential impact of interactive problem-solving simulations within a pre-existing mentoring program. This quantitative study involved 15 participants from a mid-western U.S. state. Study participants identified several positive aspects of this learning activity, including the intellectual safety of exploring in a risk-free environment. Approximately 90% of respondents reported that the simulations were relevant to their everyday work.

Hayes (2019) found that mentoring is an essential aspect of new principal success but additionally identified induction program components such as observations, data meetings, and learning walks as beneficial. The advantage of these components is that they mimic the day-to-day work scenarios most principals face. Eller (2014) utilized questionnaires, document reviews, focus groups, and reflective writing as data collection strategies to gain insight into induction for 16 principals in Virginia. Through these methods, Eller identified several specific induction program components that were perceived as effective by the participants: networking, guest speakers, collegiality, and group role play. Similarly, Taylor Backor and Gordon (2015) identified networking, cohort support groups, and ongoing professional development as important induction activities. In a literature review focused on examining the role of assistant principals over the last 30 years, observations and shadowing of experienced assistant principals and veteran principals are recommended as field experience (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

There is a collective body of research on the national and international level regarding the needs of school leaders and the best methods for supporting their professional growth through leadership development programs. Empirical research on the effectiveness of principal induction programs in Georgia is limited. Gumus (2019) utilized a qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews with mentees and their cooperating principals to examine principal

induction in Georgia. Findings support the importance of the mentoring relationship for both the mentee and mentor. A wide variety was found in the relationship between mentor and mentee, with some partnerships being very casual in their meetings. In contrast, others utilized a meeting agenda to guide conversations and learning. Several mentors utilized a pre-meeting survey to get to know their mentees. Most mentor-mentee experiences involved school visits to the collaborative partner's home school.

School leaders face many challenges in their day-to-day roles in various areas. These challenges can lead to issues of burnout and turnover. However, there are models of support intended to mitigate some of these challenges. Effective professional development can be provided through mentoring, coaching, and induction program components such as school visits and problem-solving experiences. Although support programs for school leaders are delivered in a variety of formats, all of the models focus on adults as learners.

Theoretical Framework – Adult Learning Theory

This study examined professional development for school leaders. As professional development is a form of adult learning, a theoretical framework based on adult learning theory effectively addressed the needs of this study. Although there is a multitude of theories and schools of thought related to learning, andragogy is a pillar of adult learning theory (Merriam, 2001), and Knowles is a “pioneer of the principles of andragogy” (Black & Earnest, 2009, p. 186).

There is not a singular, universally accepted definition of learning. According to Knowles et al. (2005), “Learning is an elusive phenomenon” (p. 16), and “...defining learning, like defining theory, can prove complicated.” (p. 11). Similarly, De Houwer et al. (2013) state that it is “notoriously difficult to define concepts in a satisfactory manner, especially concepts that are

as broad and abstract as the concept of *learning*.” (p. 631). Burner believes learning depends more on growth, potential fulfillment, and competencies development (Knowles et al.). Many learning theorists, including Cronbach, Gagne, and Skinner, purport that learning is a process by which behavior changes (Knowles et al.). Merriam (2004) claims, “The notion of development as change over time or change with age is fundamental to adult learning theory and practice.” (p. 60). Alexander et al. (2009) propose nine principles of learning, the first being change. They state, “A fundamental characteristic of what it means for humans to learn is that change happens” (p. 178). Knowles et al. agree that change is an important component of learning; stating, “The term learning...emphasizes the person in whom the change occurs or is expected to occur.” (p. 10). Considering the variety of definitions and thoughts, change is a construct of learning consistently present in the research. As such, one of the research questions addressed in this study will focus on how program participation has changed current administrator practices.

Adult Learning Theory

Defining a theory is as complicated as it is to define learning. Knowles et al. (2005) describe a theory as “...a guiding set of assumptions, an ordering system that neatly summarizes the facts, and/or assumptions, generalizations, and hypotheses” (p. 16) and “...theory is a comprehensive, coherent, and internally consistent system of ideas about a set of phenomena” (p. 16). Collins and Stockton (2018) address theory from a broader perspective, “whether a commonsense theory, a scientific theory, or a conspiracy theory, theories attempt to explain phenomena logically and meaningfully, often following narrative structures” (Reflexivity and Embodiment, para. 2).

The difficulties in clearly defining learning and theory combine to create ambiguity in defining adult learning theory. According to Knowles et al. (2005), a singular theory to address

adult learning has been sought for over 50 years. Although this work has been ongoing for decades, many theories still explain adult learning, and no one all-encompassing theory exists (Allen, 2007; Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). Similarly, Merriam (2001) posits that there is “...no single answer, no one theory or model of adult learning that explains all that we know about adult learners, the various contexts where learning takes place, and the process of learning itself” (p. 3). However, there exists a “mosaic of theories, models, sets of principles, and explanations that, combined, compose the knowledge base of adult learning” (Merriam, p. 3).

Early research on adult learning concerned whether adults could learn, not necessarily how they learned (Merriam, 1996). In 1927, Thorndike presented findings that “the ability to learn declined only very slowly and very slightly after the age of twenty” (Knowles, 1980, p. 55). During the next few decades, knowledge from psychology and sociology was converging to address adult learning to create a “comprehensive, coherent theory of adult learning” (Knowles, p. 42).

Theory development across disciplines continued and resulted in many explanations for how and why adults learn. From Bandura’s social learning theory, Kolb’s experiential learning theory, Bruner and Piaget’s constructivist learning theories, and more recently, Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, the lack of consensus has created tension among the various theorists (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). Merriam (2008) identifies even more theories attempting to explain adult learning, including embodied learning, narrative learning, workplace learning, cultural-spiritual learning, and race-centric learning. Critical theories are applicable across contexts and are also relevant to learning theory. Critical learning theory proposes that the goal of learning is social change and, therefore, is more concerned with why adult learning programs are occurring than with how the learning occurs (Knowles et al., 2005).

Attempts have been made to provide an organizing structure for these schools of thought. Marquardt and Waddill (2004) categorized the theories into five orientations: cognitivist, behaviorist, humanist, social learning, and constructivist. Similarly, Taylor and Hamdy (2013) sorted the theories into categories and identified six themes of adult learning: instrumental, focused on individual experience, including behaviorist and cognitive; humanistic, which is individual and learner-centric; transformative theories, which explore the role of critical reflection to challenge beliefs and assumptions; social theories which integrate the context and community of learning; motivational models of learning such as self-determination theory; and reflective models which claim a direct connection from reflection to action to subsequent change. Merriam (2001) also includes a vein of humanist learning theories in the research and proposes that these theories revolve around the ideologies of self-directed learning, personal responsibility for learning, and the proactive nature of adult learning. Andragogy is situated within this humanist perspective (Merriam).

Andragogy

The concept of andragogy was introduced to adult learning theory in 1968. The examination of this theory has been ongoing ever since, both by Knowles and other theorists within the social sciences field (Knowles et al., 2005). Knowles (1980) initially defined andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 40) and identified four crucial assumptions within andragogy: independent self-concept, collection of life experiences, connection of social roles to readiness to learn, and need for immediate application of newly acquired knowledge.

In 2001, Merriam described andragogy as one of the foundational theories of adult learning. Taylor and Hamdy (2013) place Knowles’ concept of andragogy as a theory within the

humanist school of adult learning theories concerned with learner-centered development.

Similarly, Merriam (2008) claims that andragogy is focused on the individual learner as much of the adult learning theory of the early twentieth century did without much concern for the context of learning. In 2009, Black and Earnest defined andragogy as an adult learning theory, as did Zepeda et al. in 2014. According to Knowles et al. (2005), andragogy has been described by others in the field as a set of assumptions, a theory, guidelines, and a philosophy.

Through his work and the contributions of others, Knowles continued to refine the concept of andragogy, finally describing “an andragogical theory of adult learning” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 61) and further explaining that “the andragogical model is not an ideology; it is a system of alternative sets of assumptions, a transactional model that speaks to those characteristics of the learning situation” (p. 72). These assumptions expanded from the original four crucial assumptions to six, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Six Assumptions of the Andragogical Model

Assumption	Description	Implications
The need to know	“...why they need to know something before undertaking to learn it” (p. 64)	Self-assessment to identify the gap between current knowledge and level of goal performance
The learners’ self-concept	“...deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction” (p. 65)	Inclusion of self-directed experiences

Table 1 (continued)

Assumption	Description	Implications
Role of the learners' experiences	Wide variety of experiences among adults; "...the richest resources reside in the adult learners themselves" (p. 66)	Experiential techniques that connect to previous experiences; "...group discussions, simulation experiences, problem-solving activities, case methods" (p. 66)
Readiness to learn	"...developmental tasks associated with moving from one developmental level stage to the next" (p. 67); timing of learning experiences to coincide with these changes	"...not ready for a course...until they have mastered doing the work they will supervise and have decided they are ready for more responsibility" (p. 67)
Orientation to learning	Life-centered, task-centered, problem-centered vs subject-centered in school	"...learn new knowledge, understandings, skills, values, and attitudes most effectively when presented in the context of application to real-life situations" (p. 67)
Motivation	"...most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life)" (p. 68)	Provide accessible opportunities for ongoing growth and development

Note. Adapted from Knowles, M.S., Holton, E.F., & Swanson, R.A. (2005). *The adult learner: the definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*. [electronic resource] (6th ed.). Elsevier. <https://tinyurl.com/46mtykct>

Andragogy – The Six Assumptions

According to Knowles et al. (2005), the andragogical assumption of “need to know” addresses three constructs that need to be addressed before learning. This assumption also proposes that adult learners are concerned with the how, what, and why of learning something new (Knowles et al.). The learning expectations should be communicated to address the question of how (Knowles et al.). Adult learners are also concerned with what they will be learning. To address these concerns, adult learners should be provided with a clear and realistic preview of topics that will be covered and the expected outcomes (Knowles et al.). The “need to know” assumption also addresses the issue of why learning will occur. It is beneficial for adult learners to see models of how others have applied the skills they will learn to see the usability of new skills (Knowles et al.). Allowing adult learners to collaborate in planning learning experiences addresses the “need to know” principle and the second principle related to self-concept and learner independence (Knowles et al.).

The second assumption of andragogy relates to two concepts of how adult learners see themselves (Knowles et al., 2005). This principle addresses adults as self-directed learners from two views: self-teaching and personal autonomy (Knowles et al.). Self-teaching focuses on the adult learner assuming all control for their learning, such as in an independent study model (Knowles et al.). Personal autonomy is typically observed more frequently in professional learning situations than self-teaching, as this view considers how adult learners participate in and take control of, setting the purpose for learning and establishing learning goals. Personal autonomy builds ownership in learning for adults (Knowles et al.). Both views vary based on the individual learner and the context for learning; therefore, self-directedness is situational (Knowles et al.). According to Tight (2014), a more independent self-concept requires self-

directed learning experiences, which can be demonstrated through self-identification of needs, collaborative responsibility between learner and teacher, and self-evaluation of learning.

Knowles et al. describe the factors influencing an adult learner's perception of self-directedness, including learning style, feelings of competence, and previous experiences with the new content.

The third andragogical principle is fundamental in professional development scenarios. This principle focuses on the learner's prior experiences (Knowles et al.). Merriam (2008) claims, "...with no meaningful links to prior experience, little if anything is retained" (p. 97). Knowles et al. (2005) propose that prior experience relates to new learning in four ways: a wide range of individual differences among adult learners, prior experience serves as a rich resource for new learning, biases of learners that contribute to or detract from learning, and grounding for learner identity. Taylor and Hamdy (2013) state the importance of previous experience by claiming that "All learning starts with the learner's existing knowledge" (p.1566). They further explain that "...learning is the process of constructing new knowledge on the foundations of what you already know" (p. 1561). The assumption is that adult learners not only rely on the volume of their life experiences but also on their specific and unique life experiences (Knowles et al.). Tight (2014) purports that these combined experiences create a learner's self-identity. According to Tight, every adult learner has an identity composed of unique life experiences that impact how they approach learning and process new knowledge. Zmeyov (1998) claims that experiential learning is based on applying life experiences as a source of learning, which connects to the third principle of andragogy: readiness to learn. However, adults naturally tend to resist new learning, which challenges current ways of thinking (Knowles et al., 2005). This challenge must be overcome to learn new concepts effectively, as learning requires change (Alexander et al., 2009).

The fourth assumption addresses an adult learner's readiness to learn. Knowles et al. (2005) claim that the optimal time for adults to acquire new knowledge is when life requires it. Developmentally appropriate tasks that address a move from one developmental stage to another are the foundation of this assumption (Knowles et al.). The timing of learning experiences is critical in maximizing understanding and retention of new knowledge (Knowles et al.). As with other andragogical assumptions, readiness to learn is situational and depends on a learner's level of competence, dependence, commitment, and confidence (Knowles et al.). A supervisor demonstrating competence in their current responsibilities and deciding they are ready for new responsibilities is an example of the influence of competence in readiness. Dependence is the learner's need for assistance from others (Knowles et al.). An individual adult learner's level of dependence is generally exhibited at a consistent level but does fluctuate depending on the situation (Knowles et al.). There is also an affective dimension within the construct of readiness to learn. Commitment and confidence (related to the ability to learn) contribute to the learner's need for emotional support from others (Knowles et al.).

Orientation to learning, the fifth andragogical assumption, is closely related to the assumption of prior experience, but orientation focuses on current experiences which influence the need to learn (Knowles et al., 2005). In most educational settings, children are subject-centered learners. As adults, learners are "life-centered, task-centered, problem-centered" learners (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 67). According to Knowles et al., adult learners are concerned with whether new knowledge will help address problems and tasks in their life circumstances. They also claim that adult learning is most effective "in the context of application and real-life situations" (p. 67). The immediate application of new knowledge to everyday tasks is a critical component of adult learning (Merriam, 2002; Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). According to Taylor and

Hamdy, “the process of learning new things is not just about acquiring knowledge (surface learning), it includes being able to make sense of it, and hopefully making use of it” (p. 1566).

The final assumption focuses on what motivates adults as learners. Contrary to external motivators for children, the “most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like)” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 68) for adult learners. Knowles et al. explain that adults are motivated to a degree by external motivators such as increased pay and job promotion, but internal motivators are more powerful. They also believe that, typically, adults have an internal desire to continue learning and growing. The learning most motivating for adults is learning that is deemed personally valuable (Knowles et al.). Feeling confident about their ability to learn new content and learning that will help with an issue or problem contributes to the value of learning, leading to higher motivation (Knowles et al.).

Conclusion

As burnout, shortage of educators in the principal pipeline, and longevity in the career are all challenges faced by the educational system, providing leadership development programs that effectively employ the best practices of adult learning can potentially prepare school leaders who can handle the challenges and remain in the position. This literature review provides the background for the proposed study, which explores one large suburban school district’s aspiring principal leadership program to examine the influential practices within the program through a lens of adult learning theory.

In Chapter 3, the methodology is explained utilizing the Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) approaches for a qualitative case study to explore multiple perspectives and create thick descriptions of the experiences of aspiring principals in a leadership development program. This case study utilized semi-structured interviews and document reviews to answer three research

questions. A multi-step data analysis approach was utilized, including open, axial, and selective coding. Data management, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are addressed.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative approach from the Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) perspectives. A single, bound case study model was employed with the sample case selected due to its potential to provide a thick, rich description of a phenomenon. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and relevant documents. Analysis occurred through the identification of codes, categories, and themes.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was utilized for this study. Stake (1995) explains that qualitative research seeks to understand human experience using key testimonies and narratives. Similarly, Merriam (1998) establishes the purpose of qualitative research as building an understanding of the impact of a phenomenon on the participants and from their perspectives. This study aimed to explore a case, build an understanding of perspectives, and examine complex relationships that support the selection of a qualitative design.

A case study design is aligned with the purposes of the study. Hays and Singh (2012) explain that the purpose of a case study is not to define a singular universal truth but to utilize the participants' perspectives to describe a subjective reality while answering questions of how and why. Merriam (1998) also approaches qualitative case studies from a constructivist perspective in that the goal is not to arrive at one universal truth. According to Stake (1995), the purpose of a case study is to provide a description and interpretation of phenomena. Utilizing the complimentary definitions from Hays and Singh, Merriam, and Stake, I employed a qualitative case study design, spending time in the field to build relationships with participants, develop a thorough understanding of the case, and fully explore the case as a “specific, complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 2) to examine the influence of participation in a leadership development program on aspiring school principals. Specifically, exploring the changes in

current leadership practices and the implications for preparedness for future leadership roles from the program guided the study.

This single case study is bound by one aspiring principal program in a large suburban southeastern school district. Merriam's (1998) and Stake's (1995) criteria that a case should be selected because it is the example that allows the most likelihood of enhancing understanding were essential to this study's case selection.

Sample

Two-tier sampling was utilized to select the case and to identify participants within the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling, relying on established criteria in order to identify an information-rich case, was employed (Hays & Sing, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Case Selection

Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) identify the merits of purposive sampling when conducting qualitative case study research. Qualitative research aims not to measure how much or how many (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling applies to qualitative research instead of random or probability sampling strategies. In alignment with the purposes of qualitative research, this study aims to understand a case from the participant's perspective. Therefore, purposive sampling is a relevant strategy.

Purposeful sampling based on established criteria was utilized to determine the case and identify the school district for the study.

Case Selection Criteria:

- Program contains 10-20 participants.
- Purpose of the program is to prepare leaders for the next level of leadership.

- Multi-dimensional program to include various program components beyond a traditional mentoring model.

Selecting a program with 10 to 20 leaders allowed an appropriately sized pool of potential participants. Although qualitative case study does not have a single definitive requirement for the number of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), a sample of this size allowed for an in-depth understanding of the case. A final sample of nine participants who met the study criteria was selected from the available participants. This sample size also met the time restrictions of the study and the use of a single researcher to complete data collection and analysis.

For this study, utilizing a program with an established goal of preparing leaders for the next level of leadership was important. The selection of this type of program allowed the study to address the research question related to influence on perceptions of preparedness. Development programs that exist to support school leaders at the beginning of their careers would not provide the necessary context to address preparedness.

While mentoring has been a prevalent model utilized in educational leadership support, a program with additional components was needed to effectively address the theoretical framework and research questions. The six principles of andragogy were more accessible for exploration when program components such as school site visits, group discussions, problem-solving scenarios, and leader shadowing were present.

According to Stake's (1995) sampling model, which suggests the opportunity to learn should be of primary importance and to "pick cases which are easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry" (p. 4), I have selected a case that meets these criteria. The selected leadership development program is robust and is a long-standing, prominent program in the district. Patton

(1999) expresses the importance of identifying information-rich cases in purposeful sampling, and Merriam's (1998) model requires selecting a unique or successful case. The identified case provided an opportunity for in-depth study, resulting in a thick, rich description of the phenomenon.

The selected case for this study is situated within a large, suburban public school district in the southeast. The district serves over 100,000 students in more than 110 schools. This district is considered high achieving based on SAT, ACT, end-of-grade state test scores, graduation rate, number of National Blue Ribbon Schools, and state-recognized Schools of Excellence. One principal leads each school with one to six assistant principals. For the 2022-2023 school year, nine new principals and twenty-six new assistant principals were appointed.

Within the selected district, leadership development programs are provided to meet the needs of leaders in different stages of their careers. Programs have been established for teacher leaders who plan to remain in the classroom, teachers who seek to transition into a local school leadership position, beginning assistant principals, experienced assistant principals identified by the district as ready to assume additional leadership roles, and an induction support program for novice principals. The leadership development program for experienced assistant principals was selected for this case.

Ten to twenty assistant principals are selected for the program each year through a multi-step process, including application, in-basket activity, and interview. The program follows a year-long model, with meetings held approximately once per month. Each meeting focused on one or more LKES (Leader Keys Effectiveness System) standards. Opportunities for group discussion were provided with additional group discussion occurring in online posts. These posts were also focused on LKES standards, with a program member assigned as the facilitator. In

addition to collaboration with program peers, each meeting featured guest speakers. Guests consisted of local school leaders in a panel format or presentations from district departments. Question and answer sessions followed the panels and presentations to encourage participant engagement and support connections to real-life work. Opportunities for experiential learning in a school setting were also provided. Program participants conducted multiple school site visits together. These visits included classroom walks and meetings with the administration. Principal shadowing was another form of experiential learning. With personal input, program participants were assigned to shadow a principal for a day. Participants were encouraged to visit schools outside their geographical area and at a different level (elementary, middle, high) than their past experience. Interview preparation was a vital component of the development program. In addition to discussing the principal interview format, mock interviews were held with district leadership to allow participants to apply newly acquired knowledge. Following the mock interviews, participants received personalized and immediate feedback regarding strengths and areas for growth.

Participant Criteria

Purposeful sampling based on established criteria was utilized to determine participants.

Participation Criteria:

- Participants from the same cohort.
- Program participants from the most recent year the program was implemented (2022-2023)
- Participants serving in a school leadership role in the subsequent school year.

All study participants were selected from the same program cohort. This criterion ensured that all participants received the same program experience. Attempting to compare participants'

experiences from various program implementation years would have variables that would compromise effective data analysis.

A list of all induction participants from the school year 2022-2023 was collected from the district. The selection of participants from the most recent year of program implementation provided participants with the most reliable recollection of program events. This study's second research question, concerned with how program participation has influenced current leadership practices, was more clearly discernable with recent program participants. Participants from previous years have more outside influences on their leadership practice, which may diminish the program's impact.

Only program participants serving in a local school leadership role during the 2023-2024 school year were included in the study. For this study, the school leadership role was limited to assistant principal or principal. One of the purposes of the study was to explore the influence of program participation on leadership practices. Therefore, participants needed to be currently serving in a leadership role.

Participant Selection

A total of 16 program participants met the study criteria. All potential participants were contacted via email (see Appendix A). The email included details regarding the study, a pre-study questionnaire (see Appendix B), and informed consent (see Appendix C).

The questionnaire allowed respondents to indicate an interest in participating in the study. Of the 16 questionnaires which were distributed, 11 were returned. An email to schedule an interview was sent to the 11 respondents. Ten of the email recipients followed through with scheduling an interview. From this sample of ten, one participant was chosen to be a pilot interview, resulting in a final participant sample of nine. An appropriate sample size in

qualitative research is not defined by an exact number of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). Stake states, “It is not uncommon for case study researchers to make assertions on a relatively small database” (p. 12). The sample size was small but met the purpose of qualitative case study research in exploring a case in-depth versus a study concerned with the breadth of a case (Hays & Singh, 2012). Merriam and Tisdell claim that what is needed to meet an appropriate sample size is “an adequate number of participants, sites, or activities to answer the question posed at the beginning of the study” (p. 101). The selection of nine participants for this study represented 56% of the total program participants in the selected case, allowing the study questions to be effectively addressed.

Participants represented elementary, middle school, and high school. Elementary schools comprise 59% of the schools in the district utilized for this case. Similarly, 66% of the participants in this study are leaders in elementary schools. Middle school representation was comparable, with 23% of district schools serving grades six through eight and 22% of participants serving in these schools. High schools represent the smallest portion of district schools at 15%. One participant in this study was a high school administrator, representing 11% of study participants. Several additional models exist in the district, including charter schools and special education centers. There were no study participants representing these school models. In addition to representing multiple school configurations, the group had various years of leadership experience. The range for leadership experience was 13 years, with a mean of 9 years. Table 2 provides a profile utilizing pseudonyms to represent participants.

Table 2
Participant Profile

Participant	School Level	Years in Education	Years in Leadership
Debbie	Elementary	26	9
Patrice	Elementary	16	5
Oliver	Middle	21	12
Chris	High	14	7
Monica	Elementary	16	6
Jerry	Middle	25	7
Pamela	Elementary	12	5
Paula	Elementary	22	6
Kristine	Elementary	28	18

The sample was varied but not necessarily representative of the population of leaders within the district. Heterogeneous, purposeful sampling seeks to maximize variation to include a wide range of experiences among the sample (Hays & Singh, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, maximum variation addresses transferability, not generalizability, in the diversity of sample selection in expanding the relatability of findings (Merriam & Tisdell). Although the sample for this study was small and not representative of all characteristics of school leaders in the district, all participants who met the established criteria and consented to study participation were included.

The informed consent process was followed, with participants receiving an informed consent notification in the initial email. Participants received a second copy of the informed

consent notification at the beginning of the interview. The informed consent notification included purpose, procedures, future uses of collected data, risks, benefits, compensation, voluntary participation and withdrawal, and confidentiality. All participants were over 18, which aligned with the age of research consent following Georgia law. Due to the age of participants and the nature of the study, FERPA and HIPAA regulations did not apply. The participants did not receive any incentive or compensation for participation.

Data Collection

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative data collection does not test a hypothesis but supports the building of theory and develops an understanding of concepts. To understand the case in this study, the first step in data collection was the administration of a questionnaire to all potential study participants who met the established criteria. The next steps for data collection were guided by the qualitative case study traditions of Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995). As such, document review and semi-structured interviews were utilized. Employing these multiple data sources ensured triangulation (Stake) and increased validity (Merriam). Additional strategies for addressing internal validity were utilized, such as member checking and acknowledgment of researcher bias (Merriam).

Documents

Document review was utilized as a data collection strategy prior to semi-structured interviews. Document review is a common data source in qualitative case study research and is prevalent in almost every study (Stake, 1995). Although some studies have participants create artifacts specifically for the study, most document reviews are in the form of pre-existing documents, which can provide additional perspectives in a less intrusive manner than interviews and focus groups (Hays & Singh, 2012). According to Merriam (1998), one of the advantages of

document review is that the documents already exist and do not rely on personal recollection in the same manner as interviews.

Publicly available, pre-existing documents relevant to this case study were limited. The district no longer employs the leader who planned and delivered the leadership development program for the selected year. Additionally, program participants did not receive documents outlining plans or goals for the program. The most relevant document for this study was the district's description of the leadership academy posted on the district website. This document included the targeted assistant principal audience, a description of program activities, intended outcomes, and expectations of participants. This document was analyzed for evidence of Knowles et al. (2005) six assumptions of adult learning theory in connection with the study's three research questions as outlined in Table 3. Evidence of four of the six assumptions was identifiable, and document content aligned with the three guiding research questions. The program's stated goal identifies the particular assistant principals who are the most appropriate candidates for program participation based on readiness. In addition to describing program activities, the intended purpose of the activities is explained. Program developers aspire to offer activities that support learning beyond knowledge acquisition and aim to enhance the leaders' ability to apply new understandings. The program strives to enhance leader growth based on individualized goals. This analysis informed the selection of questions for the semi-structured interviews.

Table 3*Document Analysis*

Document Excerpt	Andragogical Assumption	Research Question
“Prepare high-potential Assistant Principals for readiness for potential promotion...”	Readiness to Learn	RQ 1 & 3
“...activities that develop knowledge, skills, and understanding of [district] specific application of leadership concepts.”	Orientation to Learning	RQ 1 & 2
“...learn from exemplary current and former principals...and other district leaders.”	Need to Know	RQ 1, 2 & 3
“...challenges participants to refine their individual leadership skills and define their leadership purpose...”	The Learners’ Self-concept	RQ 1 & 2
“...engage in professional learning activities that incorporate leadership theory, global thinking strategies, instructional leadership practices, customized growth goals and systemic action planning...”	Need to Know Orientation to Learning	RQ 1, 2 & 3

In addition to the program document, researcher field notes were maintained to support the integral role of the researcher in qualitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012; Merriam, 1998). These field records documented the researcher's actions and acknowledged biases to improve the study's credibility.

Interviews

In addition to the document review, a pilot interview and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Qualitative study aims to explore and portray multiple views of the case. According to Stake (1995), “The interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). According to Hays and Singh (2012), interviews are the preferred source of data collection utilizing a semi-structured format with interview protocols. Semi-structured interviews utilize interview guides, which include open-ended and structured questions and topics for discussion (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake). In addition to questions and topics, qualitative researchers should plan to utilize probes in interviews. Although the probes cannot be planned, asking for clarification, additional details, and examples will further develop the information-rich nature of interviews (Merriam & Tisdell; Stake). Additionally, the use of individual semi-structured interviews allows for each participant to tell their own story. Similarly, Hays and Singh appreciate the opportunity for participants' voices to be revealed in individual semi-structured interviews. The participants' stories were valuable for exploring the case in this study. For this case study, the qualitative nature will require participants to tell their own stories about the phenomenon.

Pilot interviews allow the researcher to become more familiar with the interview questions, make revisions needed for clarity, and help determine the best order for the questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). Utilizing feedback from the pilot interview, questions that do not yield data relevant to the purposes of the study can be eliminated (Merriam & Tisdell). Pilot interviews also provide practice with interviewing skills (Merriam & Tisdell; Stake). This additional practice allows the researcher to focus less on the questions during an interview and more on the primary goal of listening (Stake).

A pilot interview was conducted with a former participant in the aspiring principal's program. Experience in the leadership development program allowed the participant to utilize their background knowledge to answer the interview questions. A benefit of the pilot interview was gauging the reasonableness of interview questions and the likelihood of participants willingly providing forthcoming responses. Questions were rearranged following the pilot interview to create a more logical sequence. Questions that elicited similar responses were combined or eliminated. The researcher was also able to estimate the length of time needed for subsequent interviews. This participant recently earned an educational doctorate utilizing a qualitative case study design with semi-structured interviews. Due to the pilot interview participant's experience with qualitative research methods, interviewing strategies and data collection methods for this study were also discussed.

Individual, in-person interviews and virtual interviews were offered to all study participants. Due to the ease of scheduling, all participants selected virtual interviews. Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes but ranged in length from 17 minutes to 37 minutes. The mean of all interviews was 25 minutes. All interviews occurred in one session utilizing Teams online meeting software.

The interviews began with an explanation of the need for audio recording, and recording commenced when participant permission was given. Audio recordings were created utilizing Microsoft Sound Recorder on a personal laptop, which is fingerprint and password protected. Before asking the planned interview questions, participants were provided with a copy of the questions as suggested by Stake (1995). Informed consent was discussed, and an opportunity to ask questions was provided. It is incumbent upon the researcher to ensure participants fully understand all aspects of informed consent, including an understanding of their role in the study,

not to feel pressured or compelled into participation, and have the autonomy to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants were also informed about their anonymity and steps to maximize confidentiality. Pseudonyms for all participants are used in the reporting of findings. Names of schools, district leaders, and any other identifiable information provided during interviews have been replaced with generic terms.

A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized, including prepared questions and probes to gain additional information based on participant responses (Hays & Singh, 2012). Qualitative research is flexible by design and does not support scripted and structured processes (Stake, 1995). Therefore, although participants will acknowledge informed consent, some processes of the case study will be fluid on the micro level (Hays & Singh); for example, semi-structured interviews will not necessarily include the same prepared questions or probes for all participants. The researcher developed interview questions aligned with the study's theoretical framework, literature review, and research questions (see Appendix D). Prospective interview questions were written to address each of the six assumptions of adult learning theory. Document review and the pilot interview guided the final selection and use of interview questions. The development of prospective questions allows the researcher to select the most appropriate questions as an understanding of the case develops (Stake). According to Merriam (1998), interview questions should include less structured and more structured questions; therefore, a variety of differently leveled questions were included in the interview protocol.

Rapport is critical to the success of qualitative interviewing and will be addressed through the acknowledgment of the role of the researcher, the concept of faking friendships, and addressing the nuances and intentions of rapport building (Hays & Singh, 2012). Once the interview has begun, the critical role of the researcher is to listen (Stake, 1995). Therefore, note-

taking was extremely limited. This allowed for eye contact and maintaining a comfortable, conversational style for the interview. Interview questions were structured to elicit in-depth responses, and dichotomous questions were excluded (Hays & Singh). Questions transitioned from description (i.e., “Tell me about”) to opinion (i.e., “What is your perception of?”) and allowed for both general and specific responses (Hays & Singh). Interviews closed with an opportunity for participants to share any information not covered by the interview questions.

Audio files were imported to NVivo software for transcription. Transcripts that identified the speakers in the interview were created, and each interview section was time stamped. Hard copies of transcripts were printed, and digital Word documents were created. The researcher listened to the audio recordings of the interviews and made necessary corrections to the hard copy and digital files. This process ensured accurate documentation of the interviews.

Member checking was utilized to further reinforce the internal validity of the study. The interview transcripts were emailed to participants to check for “accuracy and palatability” (Stake, 1995, p. 115). Although participants were allowed an opportunity for feedback, no changes to the transcripts were necessary.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis aims to understand the meaning of a situation for the individuals involved (Merriam, 1998) and the case as a whole (Baxter & McMaster, 2008). Analyzing data co-occurred with data collection to build understanding on the individual and whole case level. According to Stake (1995), “There is no particular moment when data analysis begins” (p. 71). Similarly, Merriam (1998) and Baxter and Jones (2008) emphasize the importance of concurrent collection and analysis. As previously discussed, automated transcription of interview audio recordings utilizing NVivo Transcription software occurred following each interview. Audio

recordings were compared to the transcripts to ensure accuracy and allow the researcher to become familiar with the content. Therefore, informal data analysis began.

In addition to transcripts, two Excel spreadsheets were created to assist with the organization and analysis of the data. The first spreadsheet was organized by participant. One worksheet was created for each participant, including their answers to the interview questions. This allowed for an in-depth review of each participant's responses. The second spreadsheet was organized by interview questions, with one worksheet for each question. Organizing the data in this manner allowed for simultaneous comparison of all participant answers for each question.

A systematic plan is necessary to effectively analyze a qualitative study's large volume of data (Baxter & McMaster, 2008; Berkowitz, 1997). Data analysis for this case involved a three-step process utilizing open, axial, and selective coding. Coding was utilized, as Stake suggests, that qualitative case studies typically employ coding to some extent (1995). This process occurred in multiple rounds, as suggested by qualitative research traditions (Berkowitz, 1997; Merriam, 1998; Srivastava & Hopgood, 2009; Stake, 1995).

Coding is categorization by assigning names to data segments, which plays a central role in qualitative research and provides the organizing structure for analysis (Maher et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019). Open coding was utilized as the first level of coding through multiple readings of interview transcripts, the program document, Excel spreadsheets, and field notes. Keywords and phrases were written on hard copy transcripts, highlighted on Excel documents, and highlighted within NVivo, which began reducing the data from "many pages of text to many segments of text" (Williams & Moser, p. 47). This process was inductive as data was analyzed at the word and phrase level (unit of analysis). From this

process, 243 codes were identified. In addition to highlighting existing text, researcher ideas were noted on transcripts.

The second level of coding employed was axial coding. Axial coding further condenses and refines the data using open codes to develop categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019). During this step, the codes identified from open coding are analyzed to find relationships and patterns, and initial thematic categories are created (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Williams & Moser). A list of the open codes was created, and color coding was utilized to designate similar terms. Additionally, NVivo coding software was used to assist in the coding process. Utilizing singular words identified through open coding, word frequency within NVivo identified the occurrence of words across all participant responses. The text search function in NVivo was used to locate each reference to the identified words, and common words were grouped. At this stage, 15 initial categories were developed.

Selective coding was the final step in the coding process. Selective coding reduces the many codes and initial categories into final themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). The 15 initial categories were reviewed and refined, resulting in the elimination of some categories and the combining of others. This is a deductive process, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest, in that evidence is sought across all data to support the creation of final categories and the identification of significant themes. Seven final categories were identified, which were influenced by the study's research questions. From these categories, three major themes emerged. Due to the use of this iterative coding process, meaning was able to be constructed. The purpose of qualitative research, and as such qualitative analysis procedures, is to construct meaning and understand a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Pope et al., 2000; Williams & Moser).

Data Management

Full consideration to effective data management strategies was given to protect the data, the researcher, and the participants. Hard copies of data, including demographic questionnaires, informed consent documents, interview protocols, transcriptions of interviews, and data analysis documents, were converted to electronic format by scanning documents into designated files. A second copy of the data was created as a working copy. Electronic documents are stored on a personal computer that is fingerprint and password protected. I am the only person who can access information on this computer. Data will be stored for three years as required by Georgia State IRB.

Trustworthiness

Although qualitative case study research is subjective and biases exist from the researcher and the participants, trustworthiness strategies can be applied (Hays & Singh, 2012). According to Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007), trustworthiness from the perspective of qualitative research is “rigorous criteria uniquely suited to the naturalistic approach” (p. 18). Multiple strategies have been employed in this study to address qualitative issues of trustworthiness.

Credibility was addressed through data source triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006), triangulation of sources and methods is used to “ensure that an account is rich, robust, comprehensive, and well-developed” (Triangulation section, para. 3). Multiple interviews and relevant document review supported data source triangulation. Although the interview participants were selected from the same leadership development program, including all participants who met participation criteria allowed for maximizing various perspectives.

Member checking is vital to qualitative credibility (Baxter & McMaster, 2008; Maher et al., 2018). Strategies of member checking were used in an ongoing manner to ensure the voices

and stories of participants were accurately reflected. Probes during individual interviews, participant review of transcripts, and sharing of the completed case study with participants were strategies used for member checking. Member checking is a critical step towards ensuring an accurate representation of participants' experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Prolonged engagement is crucial to establishing relationships with study participants and can lend credibility to the study (Baxter & McMaster, 2008; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Maher et al., 2018). As the sole researcher and through lengthy and extensive contact, I developed a thorough understanding of the context of the case. This prolonged engagement allowed for the development of positive rapport and the building of trust (Baxter & McMaster).

Transferability is another criterion for trustworthiness. Keeping in mind that qualitative research is not generalizable, transferability allows research consumers to judge the research's applicability to other contexts (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 1999). To achieve transferability, researchers must include thick, descriptive data, including a complete description of the research context (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Thick, descriptive data from individual interviews and document review, as suggested by Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995), are provided in Chapter 4. A complete description of the context has been discussed, characteristics of the participant sample have been included, and the methodological processes in data collection and data analysis are thorough enough to allow for replication.

Conclusion

This study aimed to gain an in-depth contextual understanding of the perceptions of participants in an aspiring principal program and the influence this program has on participant leadership practices. Adult learning theory serves as the theoretical framework. A qualitative, single case study following the design of Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) was utilized to answer the guiding research questions.

A large, suburban public school district serves as the case. Identification of the case aligns with Merriam's (1998) and Stake's (1995) recommendations and allowance for purposeful sampling. Individual participants were selected utilizing purposeful sampling with established criteria and acknowledgment of the importance of maximum variation within the sample. The sample included participants from the most recent cohort of the district's aspiring principal academy.

Semi-structured interviews and document review, cornerstones of qualitative research data collection, were utilized (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Data analysis began with the first piece of data collection and followed the conclusion of data collection through a multi-step data analysis coding process. A complete analysis of collected data is presented in Chapter 4.

4 RESULTS

The focus of this study was to explore the perceptions of participants in a leadership development program and to understand the influence on current and future practices. Three questions guided the research:

1. How are the principles of adult learning theory applied in a leadership development program?
2. How does participation in a leadership development program influence administrator practice?
3. Which leadership development program components influence participants' perceptions of preparedness?

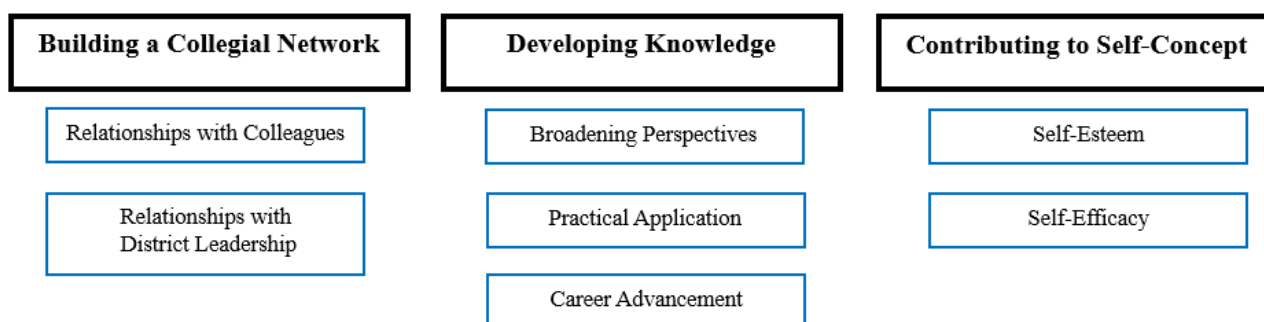
A broad body of literature has established the importance of quality school leadership (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fuller & Young, 2009; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Marzano et al., 2005). Research has also identified many significant challenges school leaders face (Bayar, 2016; Shoho & Barnett, 2010), including a lack of ongoing support (Beam et al., 2016; Crawford & Cowie, 2011). Combined, these challenges have created a deficit of candidates for school leadership positions in both quality and quantity (Hayes, 2019; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Versland, 2018). Research has shown that ongoing support, collaboration, coaching, and mentoring can positively impact self-efficacy, combat the emotional challenges of leadership, and improve retention (Hayes, 2019; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Nicolaidou et al., 2016).

This study utilized semi-structured interviews in which participants described their experiences and perceptions following participation in a leadership development academy. These school leaders discussed a wide range of topics, including motivation for seeking the development opportunity, descriptions of specific academy activities, collaboration with colleagues, superiors, and supervisors, identification of academy-developed knowledge already

applied to practice, and plans for future application. Audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews were carefully analyzed utilizing a process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. An inductive process was used to select relevant words and phrases through open coding. Axial coding was employed to combine the words and phrases into categories. This process continued with data being combined, reduced, and further reflected upon. Through this selective coding process, three overarching themes emerged. Figure 1 represents the overarching themes and categories identified through the coding process.

Figure 1

Diagram of Themes and Categories



Participating in the leadership development program built a collegial network by establishing relationships with program colleagues, other school leaders, and district-level leadership. This collegial network was viewed as beneficial during the program and had positive implications after the program's conclusion. Program participants developed their leadership skills in various areas for immediate application and future leadership roles. Specific skills were cultivated that supported the leaders in acquiring promotions. In addition to building relationships and developing skills, program participants experienced contributions to their self-concept. Self-efficacy and self-esteem were positively influenced as a result of program participation.

Building a Collegial Network

A prevalent theme across the nine interviews was the significant influence of collaboration and relationships on participants' perceptions. The terms relationship(s) and collaborate (collaborative, collaboration) were mentioned 42 times. Relationships were developed with academy peers, principals, and district supervisors. These relationships fostered collaboration during the academy and established relationships that were perceived to be beneficial post-academy.

Relationships with Program Colleagues

Participants perceived developing personal and professional relationships with program colleagues as extremely valuable. These relationships began forming during the first program meeting. This introductory, optional meeting occurred in the spring with the formal program beginning in the fall. Fifteen of the sixteen program participants chose to attend the meeting. Positive relationships began to flourish during this meeting and continued to develop throughout the year-long program. These relationships were based on mutual respect and admiration, a willingness to share, and a collegial environment. Multiple participants continued to place a high value on these relationships after the program had concluded.

Even before the program started, Chris, a high school leader, had high hopes for the potential to build relationships. When asked what he was most looking forward to when he was selected, he described the potential for relationships with colleagues and other district leaders:

I think that the biggest thing looking at the program was trying to build those relationships both with rising leaders in the district but also all around the district currently. Getting to go shadow, take opportunities to talk to different principals at different levels.

Participants were excited to work together and perceived that a collegial environment was established at the first program meeting. Oliver, a middle school leader, was excited to be selected for the program and stated, “And once we had our first meeting, I was really, I was even more happy to see the people I was surrounded by.” Oliver, Patrice, and Pamela specifically mentioned an emphasis placed on collaboration versus competition by the academy's leader. Pamela, an elementary school leader, was initially cautious about the non-competitive environment:

I think the very first day that we met, [the leader of the leadership development program] made a statement, and she said you are not each other's competition. And I was like, she's crazy. That's not true. We are absolutely in competition with each other.

However, her continued experience in the program and the relationships she was able to build with her peers supported the leader's expectation of a collegial environment:

But I quickly learned that it really wasn't that like that. It really [was] what she said.

When it came full circle, it really resonated because every individual brings something different. And when you look at our schools...it's very clear to me that I'm exactly where I am and where I should be.

Similar to Pamela's recollection of a collegial environment from the beginning, Oliver explained, “And the first thing that she said is, this is not your competition, this is your peer group.” He went on to emphasize the importance that was placed on collegiality. “And so she hammered it home that we are not in competition with one another.”

When asked about collegiality with program peers, Patrice, an elementary school leader, also highlighted the establishment of a non-competitive environment. “And from the very first meeting, they made it very clear that we were not in competition with one another. And I truly

believe that's true." Patrice described how this applied to career advancement and allowed program participants to engage with each other fully:

And so you're really not competing for a specific school and a specific job. So that kind of increases that collegiality and that open discussion and that vulnerability, all those things. And our group had a lot of transparency with one another professionally.

Although program participants engaged in class discussions during required monthly meetings and assigned discussion posts, their collegiality led to conversations outside the program's scope. Patrice recalled, "I got to know people that I didn't know before. And so, you know, text messages started back and forth or emails sharing resources." Monica, an elementary school leader, described how beneficial going to lunch with her program peers was in supporting collaboration, "...it was really good to just hear from other people and just have an opportunity to collaborate." Oliver pointed out that the program did not require collaboration on assignments or projects, but participants would contact each other outside of the program for assistance:

We may have collaborated outside of that because I met people. Like I knew at one point I was trying to do something in Excel with scheduling. So I reached out to [APA colleague] who at the time was at [high school].

Although Oliver and Monica valued the collaboration with their peers during the program, they both desired more opportunities for connection. When asked for additional perceptions of the program, Oliver mentioned, "I wish we would have had more forced interactions with other people." He further explained, "There were definitely people in my cohort that I never had an instructional conversation about or with...So I think it would have been nice if we were required to interact more with everyone in our program." When asked about collaboration with colleagues in the program, Monica described the many positives but noted, "I

wish we had more opportunity to have conversations. Our conversations were good, and we were very highly encouraged to go out to lunch in the evenings afterward.” As previously acknowledged, Monica valued the conversations with her colleagues in the more informal setting of lunch but felt that being away from the responsibilities at her school was a challenge. Monica reflected on possible strategies for addressing that need. However, she concluded:

I don't really know a solution to that, but it was really personally tough on me to hang out and talk. Yeah. Even though I know that that's an important part of the experience, it wasn't something I, I [*sic*] did often.

Program participants consistently described how the relationships built during the academy with their peers continued to be valuable after the program had concluded. When asked about collaboration with his colleagues, Chris responded excitedly, saying, “Oh, my goodness. We still talk today. We see each other at meetings. We touch base with one another with questions.” Debbie was enthusiastic when detailing how the relationships have continued. “...building those relationships was invaluable because now when I go to meetings and I see my friends, my colleagues that are high school administrators and being able to reconnect and just build that vertical connection is so important.” At the beginning of the program, Oliver was hopeful that “we're all here to help each other” and he was pleased that “it's turned out to be that way. We still communicate with each other.” When asked to describe the collaboration with program colleagues, Jerry reflected, “I will tell you, that is looking back on the whole thing now, one of my favorite parts, right? Because we still do chat.” He also said, “There's some people in that group now that are obviously I lean on” and that he was pleased to come out of the program with “the friendships and new bonds.”

Several academy participants have received promotions since the conclusion of the program. These promotions have provided benefits for supporting continued relationships. Chris detailed these benefits:

We've had a couple that just became first-year principals this year. And when we run into each other, we kind of see how that's going. Touch base on Hey, what can we do? What can we do moving forward? ...what questions or do we not know that we should be asking now that you're sitting in that chair? What's something that we can do to grow and work to help prepare ourselves when we're in that chair?

Pamela also addressed the continued relationships for those who have been promoted. She explained, "So and we still even now have that good dynamic in our new principal group, those of us that came from the academy and we kind of gravitated towards each other because we have that shared experience."

The relationships developed among the leaders in the program were perceived to be positive and influential. Discussions within the program and sharing ideas and resources outside were equally beneficial. In addition to collegiality during the year-long model, participants continued to contact each other after the program ended. Establishing a cooperative over competitive environment supported the development of these relationships.

Relationships with District Leadership

The collegial relationships developed with peers in the academy were strong, but relationships were also formed with other leaders. Program participants had an opportunity to get to know local school principals and district-level leadership. According to Chris, "I mean, able to build really positive relationships with upcoming leaders. But getting the opportunity to better get to know the leadership currently in [the district]. They sat down and worked with us..."

Many program participants were excited about the opportunity to cultivate relationships with principals. Monica identified these relationships as one of the most promising components of participating in the academy by explaining, “So I was most looking forward to interacting with other principals.” Similarly, when asked what he was most excited about when selected for the program, Jerry also acknowledged principal relationships.

So that the hope of an opportunity to get in front of these people and showcase what you know and let them see your body of work was obviously one of my main goals, but I didn't know that's how it was going to play out or not.

Paula, an elementary school leader, also focused on relationships with principals when she explained, “You're also making those connections with people who are already in the principalship [and that] has been truly helpful.”

A specific opportunity to get to know principals was provided through shadowing experiences. These experiences were among the most commonly discussed program activities, with seven of the nine participants referencing shadowing in their interviews. Chris enjoyed these opportunities so much that instead of one shadowing day, he took time to complete multiple shadowing experiences. “...I talked to [the leader of the program] and said, hey, is it okay? Can we do more than one shadow... I did a couple at middle schools and a couple of elementary schools and then another high school.” Oliver elaborated that “...it was refreshing to see [the principal's] vision of a school” as a benefit of his shadowing experience.

In addition to connecting with principals, program participants appreciated opportunities to build relationships, network, and increase their visibility with district-level leadership. One of the most influential district-level relationships was with the academy's leader. Monica described the leader as “super supportive.” Even before the program started, Patrice was delighted to be

accepted because she "...knew who was running that academy, and so I knew that I would learn a lot." Several participants noted that the academy leader sought their input when planning the shadowing experiences. Chris mentioned, "They reached out to each participant in the program and they wanted our opinions on where we wanted to shadow, what level I was excited to have."

Kristine, an elementary school leader, also appreciated the program coordinator allowing input:

We were assigned to visit a leader and shadow leader for the day, and I very much appreciated the fact that [leader of the academy] ...Would you like to do something different or who would you like to observe? So I was very thankful for that. That was really nice.

Likewise, Monica specifically mentioned the opportunity for input:

Then we went and shadowed principals at different levels and we were given a choice that we wanted to like, say we're in middle school, but we wanted to have the opportunity to see elementary school. And she set up a lot. And she, it was very meaningful in the sense of like she tried to put you with a new principal or a very experienced principal.

In addition to the supportive relationship developed with the program leader through choice and input, Monica further illustrated this relationship. "After mock interviews, she was very available. We all had her cell phone number. She told us to call her if we wanted to run through interview questions with her and prepare. And she meant it." This relationship was also impactful for Debbie's experience in the program:

It was one of those things where I think when the people that lead the program are relatable and when they truly also take time to be transparent, share a lot of their journey with you. It makes it so much more meaningful.

Jerry found that the relationship with the academy leader was enhanced through the structure of the program. He also appreciated hearing personal stories from both the academy leader and district leadership. Jerry pointed out, "...not just sit and get type of format. [Leader] always gave us scenarios, little anecdotes, like funny stories about her beginning years...nice to hear some of the district level leaders share their stories and their failures...something tremendously uplifting about that."

In addition to the academy leader, program participants valued their relationships with district leadership. The opportunity to network and increase name recognition was consistently emphasized during interviews. Debbie was encouraged to apply for the program to "...network and be given an opportunity to step outside of the school building and to work alongside other district leadership and, you know, give yourself that opportunity." Oliver explained a similar motivation in that he "...wanted to get in there and get my name seen and meet other principals with some of the area [superintendents] and get my name known that way." Similarly, Patrice felt that to "...get your name in front of the right people, those academies are a must..." Pamela also felt that increasing visibility was a valuable outcome of the academy due to her experience in a previous leadership development program. She explained, "I definitely learned from the first go around with the leader academy that you get so much exposure to get your name out there."

Just as relationships with academy colleagues continued after the program's conclusion, participants regarded relationships with school and district leaders as having long-term value. Paula reported that current principals offered, "When you move into the principal role, I will help you." She further explained that she tried to express her gratitude to those individuals "...so when my time does come up, I am able to reach out to them if I need it." Patrice highlighted the benefits of relationships with district leaders after the academy regarding promotion potential.

She explained that it is important to “connect with the right people that are making the decisions about the hiring process.” Pamela also related the long-term impact of the academy to future promotions when she discussed mock interviews:

They always do mock interviews as part of that process and those mock interviews. I mean, you can call it a mock interview, but it's really you getting to share and be interviewed by the people that sit at the table and make those decisions.

Program participants perceived the development of a collegial network to be an extremely valuable element of the program. Data analysis revealed this concept to be an important theme. Relationships were formed with academy peers, local school leaders, and district-level leadership. These relationships supported a collaborative environment among peers during the academy and produced long-term benefits as the cohort members remained in contact after the program's conclusion. Additionally, relationships were established with superiors and supervisors which program participants anticipate may translate into support and promotion.

Developing Knowledge

In addition to building a collegial network, program participants consistently identified how program participation enhanced their leadership knowledge. Participants were exposed to a variety of leadership perspectives, and knowledge for practical application was developed through multiple opportunities. Additionally, skills were built to assist program participants in advancing their careers. Peer-to-peer discussion posts, speaker panels consisting of principals and district leadership, school site visits, and mock interviews were perceived by participants as broadening their perspectives and increasing their knowledge base. Participants discovered opportunities for applying new skills to their current roles and skills that would have future implications.

Broadening Perspectives

Through a variety of experiences, program participants were able to broaden their perspectives about leadership and develop an appreciation for diversity of thought. One avenue for broadening perspectives originated from the range of experience levels, background knowledge, and cross-level understandings of the program participants. Program discussion posts allowed participants to share their values and opinions while engaging their peers in collaborative dialogue. When asked specifically what he learned from the program, Jerry observed, “Most of what I apply is more on, I guess, the theory side.”

Kristine learned about the many talents and skills possessed by her colleagues and developed a sense of respect for them. She described her experience in the mock interviews not only as an opportunity to develop her skills but also as an opportunity to learn from her peers:

And they got me on the middle school team to interview like I was going to be a middle school principal. And I was just so impressed. ...but just listening to my colleagues, honestly. [He] was part of my little group there for the mock interviews. ...with each question that was asked of him, I was just in awe. It’s an opportunity to go, wow, I work with really smart people.

Debbie focused on the inherent learning opportunities that were provided due to the mix of program participants. She felt that having diversity among her peers was beneficial. Debbie explained, “And we had elementary, middle, and high school administrators that were part of the program. And every level approaches things differently. Every level has different challenges. And it's so interesting to have those conversations cross [*sic*], across that spectrum.” Jerry, Oliver, and Paula also mentioned the benefits of having all levels represented. Paula explained, “It was great because we had elementary, middle, and high school APs there. So you know

something that high school AP might answer is something totally different than how an elementary would answer.” Jerry also discussed the variety of knowledge regarding specific skills, such as scheduling. He reported, “Hearing some of the elementary school people talking about how they schedule and then middle school. ...and then you look at high school...” Oliver addressed the broader implications of being a leader at each level when he noted, “I think just getting to touch base about what each other, what the responsibilities are for an admin at each different level.” He also pointed out the individual personalities each person brought to the program. He reflected, “I got to know [program colleague] even deeper and we had conversations about instruction and our background and I'm like, okay, we might have very similar personalities, but our skill sets are very different.” Similarly, Pamela stated:

...you would kind of expect in a situation like that that everyone would have very similar qualities. But we all were actually really drastically different from one another. But it just kind of works and that we all bring something different. And maybe what we share is just the passion for the work and that commitment and that maybe it's a work ethic thing that ties that's the tie that binds and not necessarily that you're all kind of the same person because we are not at all.

Kristine found particular value in seeing different perspectives within the discussion posts and described, “A lot of the collaborative learning especially took place on the discussion boards.” The discussion posts occurred online between the monthly in-person meetings, with each participant being assigned to facilitate one post. Although specific skills were discussed through this collaborative effort, Kristine noted the ability to see patterns emerge in the group’s thinking. She further expounded:

...posing questions and then responding to them. And that was actually a really good experience for me because again, I found that my responses were almost, you know, 15 responses are very similar. And then there was kind of my take, but it was so valuable to me because the more I would see things like patterns emerge, it was always for me a lot more than the question. I would see the patterns emerge and then, okay, if this is the way that I may be doing it this way, but I have got to understand that the vast majority of the people...

In addition to program participants having diverse ideas, learning about the differences among schools was repeatedly noted during interviews. One avenue for broadening perspectives was provided through school visits. Monica stated, "But I think just the biggest thing I learned is that every school is so different, every school is so different, every job is so different." She further detailed:

I was excited about opportunities to be a part of other schools because I think having started at a new school out here and realizing how different our schools are and how [the district], we have so many schools and they are all so different.

Monica's initial excitement about the potential for school visits was realized through the program. She reported, "We observed and well, we did like walkthroughs of an elementary, middle, and high school. And so we saw all levels and we did like a full day on that." Similar to Monica, Paula was also "...excited when I found out that we were going to get to go in different buildings and see different buildings all over the county because the county is so big and so diverse." Likewise, Pamela found school visits to be beneficial. She acknowledged, "I got to go in different buildings and that really helped me to develop and start to think about how I can take those things and make it my own..." Debbie's thoughts further supported the benefits of this

opportunity by explaining, “Walking alongside them and seeing it through their lens and coupling that with what you were seeing were some of the best conversations.” Debbie reiterated the perspective of other participants related to broadening perspectives when she pointed out, “...like everybody does things a little differently...But I mean, I think that that was very helpful in this [leadership program].”

As previously discussed, program participants consistently identified shadowing a principal as an opportunity to build a relationship with a school leader. Participants also perceived shadowing experiences as an opportunity to broaden their perspectives. Chris, Jerry, Monica, and Pamela discussed how their shadowing day pushed them and expanded their understanding. Based on where participants were placed for shadowing, Jerry perceived, “I don't know this for sure, but I'm pretty sure [leader of the program] said she's putting us, getting us out of our comfort zone.” Similarly, when asked about what program components he was looking forward to, Chris reported, “...all around the district currently getting to go shadow, take opportunities to talk to different principals at different levels. Get out of your comfort zone.” He also explained, “...they reached out to each participant in the program, and they wanted our opinions on where we wanted to shadow what level I was excited to have. Um, I like to live in the uncomfortableness...” so he chose an elementary school to begin his shadowing but also visited middle and high schools. Monica’s perspective further supported the value of visiting schools:

I think that doing the shadowing for the day was a really good opportunity to see how things go all day long from a different perspective and just kind of see how the school is run because every school is just a little different...

When describing her shadowing experience, Pamela detailed how her previous experiences were different from the principal she shadowed:

...a different type of leader than me. But we both shared a really strong passion for the instructional aspect. And so, it was really cool to kind of see that because it was just different than my principals that I've worked with in the past, and it really helped me to have a different perspective of what I could look like as a principal versus maybe what I'd seen with my other experiences.

Program participants consistently expressed appreciation for the opportunities to build knowledge. Various experiences, along with the composition of the program participants, broadened their perspectives. School visits, discussion posts, and principal shadowing were perceived by participants to positively contribute to their leadership knowledge and further develop an appreciation for diversity of thought.

Practical Application

In addition to broadening their perspectives, participants gained practical skills they perceived as beneficial. Going outside of the program to visit schools and shadow principals provided opportunities for gaining new perspectives. However, bringing school leaders and district-level departments into the program allowed participants to enhance specific skill sets. In addition, participants consistently identified specific skills for practical application that they acquired from each other.

According to the district's program description, "...participants enjoy opportunities to learn from exemplary current and former principals, assistant superintendents, directors, and other district leaders." Most program meetings did include a panel of currently serving principals who presented information and allowed for a question-and-answer session. These panels

consisted of principals from elementary, middle, and high school settings. Program participants were able to gain insight into the principals' experiences and learn practical strategies for leadership. The perceived value of these panels was frequently mentioned during the interviews, with eight out of nine respondents addressing this topic. Oliver enthusiastically described the principal panels when he stated, "So a lot of it was just us getting to pick the brains of the principals there, which was always fantastic."

When asked what she learned from the program that she had already applied or would like to apply someday, Monica raved:

Those [principal panels] were so good. Like you take notes. You don't stop taking notes. It was really good. Every time we had a principal panel, we had all three levels.

So it was good for them to kind of talk about, you know, like kind of piggyback off each other and the conversations that were going on.

Paula also described how hearing principals' experiences was helpful. She shared, "I mean, the biggest thing is going back to hearing everybody's different experiences and how they got there. But then once they got there, how they handled that." Debbie described how the principal panels provided a dose of reality compared to the idealistic view of those who have not yet served in the role. She emphasized, "...yet hearing from actual people that you know are in that role and what does that look like? What are some of the things you dealt with?" Debbie found the principal panel participants to be "...very honest and they do allow you into their space, into their headspace."

Jerry, Pamela, and Monica specifically addressed the benefit of learning from principals who were new to the role. Jerry also perceived the panels as beneficial by explaining, "But the bringing in of principals at various stages in their career and various levels... And to hear some

of their [*sic*] their war stories from their beginning years and, and to what they're doing now...That was nice.” When asked what skills she learned from current principals, Pamela replied, “So I think I took a little bit from everyone and just the things that they shared. And early on, one that was really impactful for me was [high school principal], because he had just transitioned to that role.” Similarly, Monica noted, “I really enjoyed hearing from principals that were new to the district, and because it was like fresh on their mind, like what they weren't expecting, what surprised them, areas of growth and that sort of thing.” Later in her interview, Monica, like Pamela, described a specific principal she learned from who was also new to the role. She commented that the principal “...talked a lot about her experiences as the first year [principal] and she talked a lot about journaling and keeping your focus on, you know, because there's so many things going on. Keeping your focus on your core values.” Monica has implemented this strategy and has started keeping a journal of her own.

Several participants commented on how the principal panels helped them learn about relationships and the school environment. Debbie explained, “...one thing that a number of current principals talked to us about was the difference between culture and climate...When you become a principal, how do you learn about that culture? How do you honor the traditions?” Monica also addressed relationships when she described one particular principal panel, “...their topic was relationships and building relationships. And I thought that [*sic*] that was really good.” Debbie found particular value in the multiple perspectives the panels brought to the discussion about relationships. She concluded, “What what [*sic*] do high school administrators deal with? How do they approach things differently? How do they relate to their staff differently? Because it's hard to grow in those opportunities.”

Additional skills garnered from principal panels were mentioned by participants, including the school improvement process, beginning of the year pre-planning activities, promoting your school through social media, communication with stakeholders, and decision-making. Pamela recalled, “Like I very vividly remember, [middle school principal], addressed our group and he talked about school improvement and how the principal's job is to improve the school.” Jerry reflected on developing activities for teacher pre-planning, “I remember when [principal] came up and shared some of his ideas about pre-planning activities to build feedback...” Monica recollected, “And she also talked a lot about social media and sharing your story, because if you don't share your story, other people are going to share their stories.” Similar to Debbie and Monica’s identification of relationships as an essential skill learned from the principal panels, Patrice discussed building relationships with the community through communication. She stated, “...there were some good communication suggestions from a principal panel about just consistency and communication, about getting to know your community.” Paula detailed a quote from an educational author that she remembered from more than one principal panel. She shared, “Another one is, and I wrote this down, the principal at [middle school] quoted Todd Whitaker and said to make all your decisions based on what is [*sic*] what your best teachers do.” Paula further explained, “So later, when we had a couple of other principal panels, they also referred to that.”

Another opportunity to learn specific skills was provided through program meetings featuring various departments from the district. Paula said that she:

...loved when we were able to speak about the different parts of the district. And so we had HR come talk to us. We had communications come and talk to us. We had finance

come to us. So being able to speak to those different parts of the district gave me more of a well-rounded experience of what I'm going to be dealing with as a principal.

Jerry also identified learning from district departments as beneficial. He recalled, "So I do have a little APA folder and I will sit there and go like I remember when [director of district communications] came to one of our meetings and said this about using your Twitter account."

Although program participants gained skills for practical application from principal panels and district departments, they also developed skills for immediate application from each other. Participants identified many areas of knowledge that were influenced by their colleagues, including staff evaluations, assessment programs, school-wide schedules, procedures and routines, digital communication, and organization strategies.

Paula detailed several areas where she learned practical strategies from her peers that she could implement immediately. She summarized that she was "...learning across the board" and "...definitely brought back little things that we started [implementing]." Debbie concurred regarding practical application when she explained, "We definitely had a lot of opportunities to kind of process the information we were given and then kind of assimilate that. What will this look like when we go back to our schools."

In addition to building leadership knowledge by broadening perspectives through exposure to different viewpoints and schools, program participants were able to gain practical understandings related to their day-to-day work. Principal panels addressed a multitude of specific topics, including utilizing communication, building relationships, and managing your first year as principal. District departments and program colleagues also served as a source of skill development with program participants reporting several strategies they have already implemented.

Career Advancement

Combined with opportunities to build knowledge and skills for practical application, program participants frequently prioritized the perceived benefit of skills to assist them in acquiring the next level of leadership. Participants mentioned how they enhanced their skills through mock interviews and developed an understanding of district expectations of school leaders. From the program's start, Patrice was hopeful that she would build her knowledge base about the principalship. She explained, "...I knew that I would learn a lot and kind of fill in some gaps in my experience and my knowledge about the role..." Participants would perceive that addressing these gaps and building specific skills would aid in their preparation for the principalship.

Mock interviews were perceived as extremely valuable and mentioned by seven of nine research participants. However, several respondents discussed general interview preparation in addition to the mock interviews. When asked what helped prepare him the most for his next step in leadership, Oliver definitively responded, "The interviews." He explained, "That was the biggest piece for me. Was [*sic*] as we talked about interview prep, we got a lot of advice from former aspiring principals that were principals." Oliver added, "So we had a lot of conversations about the interview process for tier one [initial principal interview]." Likewise, Chris and Jerry noted the focus on interview preparation. Chris commented, "They sat down and worked with us and prepped interviews before we sat down for tier one tier one [*sic*] interviews." Jerry correspondingly reported, "They make no secret of saying it's going to be scenario-based and long. Please ask us to repeat. Please take notes. Which really did a great job mentally preparing." Patrice reinforced the critical need for being able to interview effectively when she hypothesized, "Um [*sic*], you know, one piece of it definitely is the interview process and interview

preparation, because let's face it, I mean, you have to be able to make it through.” Although the mock interviews were beneficial, Jerry, who has been through the principal interview process, claimed, “...I thought the mock interview experience to get in front of the area [superintendents]... But I thought the mock interview questions were way easier than the real.”

Many program participants claimed the mock interviews to be beneficial in enhancing their skills. Pamela placed a high value on the mock interview process even before the program started. She identified the interviews as a component she looked forward to when she was selected for the program. Pamela contended:

...they always do mock interviews as part of that process and those mock interviews, I mean, you can call it a mock interview, but it's really you getting to share and be interviewed by the people that sit at the table and make those decisions.

Chris and Patrice perceived the mock interview process to be a valuable, positive experience. Chris reflected, “We had mock interview sessions with them. It was a really nice time to sit down, talk, discuss, and learn.” Patrice pointed out, “So having the opportunity to do mock interviews, to kind of collect talking points for potential interview questions and scenarios, I mean, that was very valuable.”

While Oliver and Monica also perceived the mock interviews as a positive experience, they both mentioned the opportunity for feedback. Oliver explained, “...we did the mock interviews for tier one with assistant superintendents and got...direct feedback...So that was very powerful. I think that would be the biggest piece out of all of that was the preparation for the interviews.” Likewise, Monica acknowledged, “But it was really an opportunity for you to get some feedback and kind of think about, you know, what they were asking and that sort of thing.”

Although program participants placed value on the mock interviews, two participants acknowledged their feelings about the process. Both Monica and Kristine had trepidation regarding this particular program activity. Kristine stated, “So they had the mock interviews set up. And so we were broken into groups. And I was really a little bit nervous.” Similarly, Monica described her feelings, “So I will say I wasn't looking forward to the mock interviews...” Although Monica was hesitant, she acknowledged, “However, if I'm going to apply in a month, I'll be sitting next to all of these people again.” Following the mock interviews, Kristine had a different feeling. She reported, “And honestly, that mock interview experience, it really almost just kind of settled me to a degree as well.” Likewise, Monica indicated a change in perspective and explained that the mock interviews “...turned out to be really meaningful.”

In describing professional learning activities in the program, the district refers to developing “knowledge, skills, and understanding of [District] specific application of leadership concepts. Several participants felt they better understood the unique district expectations for its school leaders due to program participation. Understanding these expectations was perceived to be potentially beneficial in securing a leadership promotion. Participants also felt they would be more successful as principals because of this knowledge.

When asked why she was interested in applying for the program, Kristine explained, “I mean, again, it was for me so much more than about becoming a principal. It's understanding the expectations of district leadership for leaders.” Kristine referenced this again later in her interview about the district's values. She stated, “Like I shared learning for me about what how how [*sic*] we put out what our core values are, but how they apply those values with selecting leaders and what their expectations are of leaders.” Similar to Kristine, Oliver was optimistic about becoming more familiar with district expectations. When asked what he hoped to learn,

Oliver disclosed, "...to get confirmation from those people what it is they are looking for in leadership in [the district]." Paula connected lessons learned from district departments visiting with the academy to understanding district expectations. She reported:

And then going back to when when [*sic*] [leader of the APA] scheduled those department leaders to come and talk to us and she scheduled communications and HR and evaluations and everybody to kind of just from that district perspective of what their goals are and what they need you to do. As a principal, I have I took [*sic*] really good notes on those sections so that I could refer to those as I need.

Kristine, Oliver, and Paula discussed the clarity they gained surrounding district expectations of school leaders. Patrice expanded that idea and related program knowledge to state-level expectations. When asked about how she has applied skills gained from the academy to her daily work, she explained:

Oh, you know, I still go back. So I used a OneNote notebook and took notes. And then I created a tab for each of the LKES standards and tried to like I mean, I'll tell you like I went through the LKES fact sheets and really unpacked what the state says leaders are charged with doing in each of those eight areas.

Patrice said she then "...started to flesh out what I learned from the academy."

Broadening their perspective, developing skills for practical application, and acquiring knowledge that would assist in career advancement were perceived as important to program participants. These opportunities were provided through peer discussion, leader shadowing, school visits, principal panels, district department presentations, and mock interviews.

Additionally, participants were able to build an understanding of the district's expectations for

school leadership. The relationships that participants developed, combined with the acquisition of knowledge and skills, contributed to participants' perceptions of positive self-growth.

Contributing to Self-Concept

Program participants' self-concept was positively enhanced through contributions to their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Encouragement received from others, contributing knowledge to the group, developing a "principal lens," envisioning themselves as a principal, and exploring their core values all contributed to personal growth. This growth was perceived to be beneficial in their current roles and was expected to contribute to their success as they advanced in their careers. Participants also highlighted the importance of encouragement from others and the perception of their readiness in their decision to participate in the program. Every participant interview included comments related to positive self-growth.

Self-Esteem

From a humanistic perspective, self-esteem is a person's sense of self-respect and respect from others (Maslow, 1943). Self-respect consists of a sense of achievement, mastery, and being able to make contributions. Respect from others is derived from feelings of being valued and accepted. Participants reported positive contributions to their self-esteem due to being selected for the program. Utilizing their prior experiences to contribute to the group also positively influenced self-esteem.

Even before the first meeting of the academy, participants connected the program with positive emotions as they felt honored to be selected. When asked how they felt about being one of the sixteen selected for the program, knowing there were many more applicants than vacancies, participants used a wide range of descriptors including overwhelmed, excited, hopeful, and humbled. Debbie explained, "At first, I remember I was just overwhelmed. I mean, it just [*sic*] there's nothing like being chosen for something." She also described being selected as

a “great honor.” Similarly, Chris, Paula, and Kristine described being selected as an honor. Chris reported, “It’s a great honor. I mean, surprised that out of as many staff members as we have here in the district, that you’re one that they viewed as potential to move up into that position.” Paula shared, “I felt very honored, and I was excited about it.” Likewise, Kristine mentioned, “I felt incredibly honored and really valued and that was really nice.”

In the explanation for the intent of the program, the district describes selected candidates as “high-potential assistant principals.” Accordingly, participants perceived their selection into the program as validation from the district of their value as school leaders. As Kristine mentioned, she particularly felt valued due to her leadership journey being quite different from the rest of her peers. She reported that she felt like a “square peg” yet she felt that “...[the district], we recognize that leaders come in different forms, so made me feel valued.” Chris also viewed his selection in this way and described that being selected was a “nice validation.” Oliver expressed a similar emotion of validation. He noted, “I was excited, but I was very happy that I was recognized as someone to make that opportunity to be a part of that group.” Paula reported feeling “...like the county was investing in me and making sure that I was going to be prepared for the next step.”

Although being selected was considered an honor by all participants, Debbie and Patrice also described their feelings of trepidation. Debbie questioned her abilities and explained, “And there’s always that fear of what if I don’t measure up? Or what if I don’t? What if I’m not what everybody thinks I am or what [*sic*]? And what if I can’t follow through?” Patrice concurred:

I do think when you decide to advance your career, there’s still a feeling of that imposter syndrome. And when I got accepted because I had not been in school leadership for very long, it was a little bit of doubt of do I belong here. Should I have this seat at the table?

Patrice was able to overcome those doubts through "...this constant reassurance that we belonged in the academy and that eventually we would belong in a school..." Several other participants discussed how the program built their confidence. When asked how he applied learning in the program to his daily work, Oliver stated, "Believe it or not, it was a confidence thing." He further elaborated, "I would also say being around that group of people and the camaraderie that we had, it just made me more confident..."

One source of this boost in confidence came from the perception that the academy encouraged the participants to be authentic and find value in their individuality. In addition to Patrice and Oliver's increased confidence, Chris, Pamela, Paula, and Kristine addressed this emotion in their interviews. Pamela asserted that the academy experience "...really resonated because every individual brings something different." She expressed how she felt reassured in her skills, "But it just kind of works and that we all bring something different." Chris also addressed the focus on individuality. He perceived the program encouraged him to reflect when he explained, "What are your [*sic*] what do you find are your most important values in the role, in the position? What do you look for in a classroom? How do you view the job?" When asked what she would like to implement in the future, Paula referenced the district's expectation that even though you may hear a consistent message about how to be a successful principal, you still have to be true to who you are. She stated, "And one good thing that you just don't apply, your leadership skills are applicable to how you are as a person." Patrice felt very strongly about the emphasis on each leader's unique talents. She explained, "...we needed to remain true to who we were and authentic to our own leadership style. And I'll tell you, I'm [*sic*] I'm so glad that was very powerfully reinforced every single meeting..." Patrice was able to connect that emphasis

directly to her current work. She concluded, "...because if I had not done that and I was at this school, it would be a bad situation." Kristine agreed that there was a focus on individuality:

And what I discovered in the principals um [sic] that the aspiring principals is really, it's what sets you apart that they were looking for. You know, it's like they're not looking for the person who's so amalgamous [sic] that they can fit to support anything. They want to know that this person can do, this, this, and this, and that would make them great for this school...

As well as feeling valued when they were selected for the program and building confidence through an acceptance of individuality, several participants mentioned their value in being able to make contributions to the group. When asked how her success as a leader contributed to her participation in the program, Patrice discussed her experience as an assistant principal. She explained, "You know, I think that I was fortunate to be given a lot of responsibility and a lot of freedom to do a lot of work." Patrice was able to connect this work to her experience in the program. She reported, "But that made my learning curve and my toolbox and my experience much broader than I [sic], than probably a typical assistant principal. So I think that gave me a lot more talking points..." Pamela was also appreciative of the experiences she had as an assistant principal. She explained, "So I definitely think as an assistant principal, I was very lucky to have had a wide variety of experiences." She, too, could connect that work into collaboration with her peers. Pamela reported, "...going into that when you come together with other AP's, there were lots of things that I could share and contribute that maybe they hadn't had experiences in, and I could bring some of that to light and have conversations..." Paula described a similar assistant principal experience with the three leaders she served with.

She described those principals as "extremely collaborative" and explained that:

They have included me from the get-go about decision-making on all planning, and that has helped me...I feel like I have been able to almost co-principal with all three of my principals that I have, and that has helped me.

Like Patrice and Pamela, Paula connected these experiences to being able to make contributions to the program. She reported, “And because I felt like I was able to speak to things that perhaps some other assistant principals weren't able to speak to because they hadn't had that experience, and they hadn't had that collaborative environment.”

Participants consistently reported that feelings of value were positively enhanced through program participation. They viewed being selected as an honor which impacted their perception of being respected by others. Self-respect was also bolstered through their ability to make contributions to the group.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1993) as “people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (p. 118). Bandura and Locke (2003) found that self-efficacy significantly contributes to a person's motivation and overall performance, specifically enhancing setting ambitious goals, commitment to achieving goals, and improved ability to handle novel and challenging situations.

According to the district strategic plan, one of the academy's goals is to prepare participants for the next leadership level. Similarly, the district description of the program expands on that concept by stating that the academy intends to support leaders “in pursuit of increased responsibility.” Throughout the leadership development program, participants were encouraged to assume a “principal lens” to frame their learning. Multiple participants discussed the use of this lens, how they were able to prepare for their next leadership role, and how they

were able to envision themselves as a school principal. As a result, participants identified a positive influence on self-efficacy due to program participation.

Participants found occasions during the program where they were encouraged to assume a principal lens, and these moments were perceived as beneficial. When asked how the program has prepared him to be a principal, Chris explained that he began to reflect on himself in that role. He elaborated, “I think the program really is built around understanding your why. Why are you getting into the role as a principal?” Chris’s perception can be connected to the district’s program description which includes, “The [program] challenges participants to refine their individual leadership skills and define their leadership purpose...” Later in his interview, Chris revisited how he continued to expand his perspective during the program and began to see the bigger picture of school leadership. He stated, “If I’m sitting in this [principal] chair, I know what these roles are as an admin, but how does that impact the entire building? Looking at more whole staff decisions rather than departments or programs.” During the program, Oliver was able to assume additional responsibilities in his current role. He described how he worked with his principal, “So I had a conversation with my principal about being a [sic] not trying to be the principal. But making more decisions and being given that kind of freedom.” Oliver’s participation in the program supported practicing those skills and encouraged him to envision his role in the future. He believed, “That gave me more confidence to say yes, no matter where I am as a principal, I have to make it work for my school within the parameters of the district.” Pamela deduced, “Like you can’t [sic] nothing can really prepare you and you just have to be ready to go and you need to start looking at life through a different lens.” She further added that she was able to apply that lens perspective right away:

You know, you're just starting out and just knowing that you have to put [sic] now you have to find your principal lenses right and see the school. And when you're walking around, you're looking at it in a different way. So that's something that right away I can take and kind of apply to what I was doing.

Kristine also began seeing herself as a school leader. She explained that she had not considered it in detail but started identifying her strengths due to the program. She reflected, "This is what I would bring if I was the leader." As she began to develop that vision of herself as a leader, Kristine also collected information from the program that she perceived would help her in her future role. She explained, "But I had actually started a notebook and I still add to it that whole year last year. So I did a section for if I return to the district...if I if I [sic] become a building leader..." Patrice also felt the program positively influenced her perception that she was ready to assume the next level of leadership. She reported, "I really do feel like the thing that pushed me forward was just reaffirming that I [sic] I'm ready. ...I think that you can always doubt, you can always think about timing. And it just [sic] that experience just made me go for it."

Although the program enhanced a sense of self-efficacy for some participants, several participants acknowledged their preparedness to assume the next level of leadership as their reason for applying to the program. When asked about his motivation for applying to the program, Jerry explained that his primary motivator was feeling ready for the next step. He explained, "...sitting in AP meetings and just looking around and listening and saying...And even some of the APs that were promotion-ready. That I just felt like, you know what? I can I can [sic] contend with these people." Jerry also took ownership of his decision to apply for the program. He reported, "Um [sic], so going into the [aspiring leader academy], I was, [sic] I felt

like that was one of the first times I really initiated my leadership journey.” He felt like the decision to apply supported his feelings of “...you know what, I think I’m ready.” Although Monica received a “little bit of a push” to apply for the program from a district-level leader, she also felt ready to move up because she “...could really envision myself as a principal...” Chris also indicated his readiness to assume a higher level of leadership. He explained, “I have shaped a vision of, hey, this is and [*sic*] I could see myself in that role and I really want the opportunity to get a school one time and, and [*sic*] take ownership of that.” He felt that “...the aspiring principals [program] was one of the first steps.”

Study participants frequently described how the leadership program contributed to developing a principal lens and supported a vision of future success. According to Bandura (1993), “Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave” (p. 118). Therefore, efficacy is a powerful influence on success and an important component of leadership development.

Conclusion

Nine educational leaders who participated in a district-provided leadership development program were interviewed for this study. These interviews were audio recorded and NVivo was utilized to create transcripts. A process of open, axial, and selective coding was employed through researcher and NVivo analysis. Guided by three research questions and framed by adult learning theory, three themes emerged through the analysis process: building a collegial network, development of knowledge, and contributions to self-concept. Participants perceived the relationships they developed in the program to be valuable. These relationships were established with program colleagues as well as district-level leadership. The benefits of these relationships were experienced during the program and extended beyond its conclusion. Leadership knowledge, skills for practical application, and skills to assist with career advancement were

acquired during the program. Multiple opportunities, including principal shadowing, school visits, district presentations, principal panels, and mock interviews, were perceived by participants to improve their leadership skills. Every study participant mentioned the program's contribution to positive self-growth on self-esteem and self-efficacy. Participants felt valued by being selected for the program and through their ability to contribute their knowledge. Through developing their principal lens, participants could envision themselves in the principalship and increase their professional confidence. Chapter 5 will connect study results with relevant literature, address adult learning theory assumptions, and provide implications for practice and further research.

5 DISCUSSION

A qualitative case study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with nine district-led leadership development program participants. Three questions guided the research:

1. How are the principles of adult learning theory applied in a leadership development program?
2. How does participation in a leadership development program influence administrator practice?
3. Which leadership development program components influence participants' perceptions of preparedness?

A systematic process of coding was employed to analyze participant interviews. Through this analysis, the findings indicate three areas in which the participants perceived an influence on their leadership development due to program participation. The first theme identified was building a collegial network. Results show that participants were able to build relationships with their program peers and district-level leaders. These relationships were perceived to be beneficial during the program and after the program's conclusion. The second theme focused on the development of knowledge and skills. Participants were able to build their leadership knowledge by broadening their perspectives, acquiring practical understandings, and gaining skills that could lead to career advancement. A variety of program activities provided these opportunities for knowledge development. The final theme to emerge was contributions to self-concept. Changes in self-concept occurred through positive contributions to participants' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Program participants experienced a sense of being valued and honored by being selected for the program, and they were able to develop a vision of themselves as successful principals.

Knowles et al. (2005) andragogical model of adult learning theory framed the study to address the three research questions. Table 4 summarizes the connections between research questions, andragogical assumptions, overarching themes, and key findings. This discussion will

also use this theoretical framework to connect study findings and relevant literature. Implications for practice for school leadership development programs will be provided. In conclusion, suggestions for further research will be discussed.

Table 4

Key Findings Connections

Research question	Andragogical assumption	Overarching theme	Key findings
RQ 1 & 2	Role of Learners' Experiences	Building a Collegial Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared experiences • Group discussions • Variety among learners in the program
RQ 1 & 3	Readiness to Learn: Timing of Knowledge Acquisition & Need for Emotional Support	Building a Collegial Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ready for additional roles & responsibilities • Relationships provided emotional support & opportunities to learn
RQ 1, 2, & 3	Need to Know: What, How, & Why	Developing Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in knowledge • Models of skills being used • Understanding of district expectations
RQ 1, 2, & 3	Orientation to Learning: Learning Through Life-centered Activities	Developing Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shadowing & school visits • Mock interviews: practice with feedback • Immediate application
RQ 1 & 2	Learners' Self-Concept: Viewed as Capable of Self-direction & Personal Autonomy	Contributing to Self-Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of being valued • Personal goals; principal lens • Collaboration between participants & "teacher" • Feelings of competence
RQ 1	Motivation	Contributing to Self-Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal motivation • Natural desire for continuous learning

Major Themes

Building a Collegial Network

Participants identified the opportunity to develop relationships with their colleagues as one of the most valued aspects of participating in the leadership academy. The academy provided a collegial, supportive environment, leading participants to dialogue with their peers beyond the academy's requirements. These collegial relationships were appreciated during the program but continued to thrive after the program's conclusion. Additionally, relationships were established with school principals, the program's leader, and district leadership. Relationships with school principals provided opportunities to increase participants' professional network and contributed to the potential for support when program participants are promoted. The relationship with the program's leader was highly valued for its supportive nature. Participants appreciated the level of accessibility with the leader and the intentionality of the program design she utilized. Participants also perceived the program as an opportunity to increase their visibility with district leadership, allowing them to showcase their skills and talents.

Participants perceived a high level of collegiality and placed significant importance on this environment. While all participants had positive recollections of relationships established during the program, one-third of participants expressly referred to establishing this collegial atmosphere from the first meeting. Pamela, Oliver, and Patrice referenced the program leader's emphasis on cooperation instead of competition. According to relevant literature, an environment of collegiality is highly beneficial in support programs for beginning principals (Eller, 2014). In contrast, when examining a university-sponsored program for principal preparation, Taylor Backor and Gordon (2015) found that opportunities for collaborative learning were lacking. However, the educational leaders in this case study perceived their relationships and opportunities to learn from one another as highly collaborative. Patrice commented, "And then,

you know, I just [*sic*] I got to know people that I didn't know before. And so, you know, text messages started back and forth or emails sharing resources.” According to Black and Earnest (2009), leadership development programs should include activities supporting the development of social relationships. This type of learning environment results in the creation of “influential relationships” (p. 186).

Participants consistently described how they supported one another throughout the interviews. They could rely on each other for emotional support and technical expertise. A common challenge for school leaders is the isolation and loneliness of the position (Hayes, 2019; Slater et al., 2018; Versland, 2018). This can be influential as isolation indicates job satisfaction and significantly predicts a school leader’s longevity (Bauer & Silver, 2017). Issues of isolation and loneliness experienced by assistant principals can be attributed to the change in work friendships when an educator moves into a leadership role (Craft et al., 2016). Debbie expressed an emotion that many of her colleagues shared when she stated, “You know, it's just something that's going to be [*sic*] have such worth and just that survival piece of being an adventure and not feeling like you're alone.” Relationships established during the leadership development program can potentially combat these feelings of isolation and loneliness.

The educational leaders in this study frequently emphasized how they built positive connections with peers, principals, and district leaders. A collegial environment, emotional connection, and opportunities to network with colleagues not typically within their realm contributed to developing an extended professional network. An overall lack of support from districts is a common concern for school leaders (Crawford & Cowie, 2011; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fuller & Young, 2009; Wang, 2022). When formal support is not provided through adequate professional learning, induction support, or mentoring, leaders tend to

create informal networks on their own (Beam et al., 2016; Fuller & Young, 2009; Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Versland, 2018). Specifically, creating small group networks and establishing positive professional relationships benefit mid-career assistant principals as they prepare for the next level of leadership (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). According to Jerry, “The networking at the end of the day, what I took out of the [leadership development program] thing. That was my favorite.” Participants appreciated and valued these networking opportunities. Networking and developing cohort support groups are essential leadership support components (Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015).

Principal shadowing was a highly valued program experience. Seven participants discussed principal shadowing and reported a positive correlation between building relationships and networking. Correspondingly, research supports these findings. Field-based experiences, such as shadowing experienced assistant principals and veteran principals, should be included in professional development programs for aspiring principals (Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Oleszewski et al., 2012). This practice provides an opportunity to develop professional relationships (Hayes & Burkett). Research has also found that school leaders need ongoing, continued support after being promoted to the principalship (Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). Participants expressed that the relationships they formed with principals through shadowing would continue to be beneficial after the program's conclusion. Paula concurred with her program colleagues when she reported that principals offered, “...when you move into the principal role, I will help you,” and that she would feel comfortable contacting them for support when needed.

Knowles et al. (2005) propose six assumptions of adult learning theory. Two of these assumptions, the role of the learners' experiences and readiness to learn, are relevant to the relationships established with colleagues and district leadership through the leadership

development program. The role of the learners' experiences addresses the wide variety of differences among adult learners and claims that experiential learning provides opportunities to support knowledge development (Knowles et al.). Group discussions are also viewed as an essential component of learning. All participants served as assistant principals during the program. As such, collegial relationships could be established based on common prior experiences. Even though all participants served as assistant principals, there was a wide range of experience levels, and all K-12 structures were represented (elementary, middle, and high school). Participants mentioned an appreciation for this diversity in the group, which contributed to establishing relationships and ultimately led to increased learning. Group discussion posts and collegial conversations outside of the program's parameters also provided an opportunity to build beneficial relationships. Shadowing principals provided an opportunity to observe and learn through experiencing the role of a principal in a real-world setting. In addition to gaining skills and knowledge through shadowing, relationships were developed that were perceived to have a long-term impact and serve as a resource for program participants when promoted.

The second assumption of adult learning theory relevant to the relationships established in the leadership development program is readiness to learn. This assumption acknowledges the importance of timing related to acquiring new knowledge. It claims that the best time for adults to develop new skills is when they move from one developmental stage to another (Knowles et al., 2005). Assistant principals choosing to participate in a leadership development program because they have decided they are ready for a principalship is an example of the assumption of readiness to learn. Collegial relationships and professional networks were developed due to participation in the program, which will provide long-term support to these leaders as they

advance their careers. The program allowed these relationships and networks to develop, but the participants needed these networks due to moving from one leadership role to the next.

Readiness to learn also addresses the learner's need for emotional support from others related to the individual's level of competence and dependence (Knowles et al., 2005). Levels of competence and dependence are situational and fluctuate throughout our professional lives (Knowles et al.). Although participants of the program were experienced assistant principals, they lacked competence in being principals and, therefore, were more dependent on the knowledge and emotional support of others. The relationships they were able to form during the program provided emotional support as well as opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills.

Issues of isolation (Hayes, 2019; Slater et al., 2018; Versland, 2018), lack of support (Crawford & Cowie, 2011; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fuller & Young, 2009; Wang, 2022), and the absence of collaborative learning (Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015) are concerns of school leaders. Creating collegial environments (Eller, 2014) and providing experiential opportunities (Knowles et al., 2005) enhance school leaders' experiences and support their learning in a development program. Beneficial relationships and the development of professional networks with peers and district leadership were commonly addressed by study participants. These relationships and networks were based on prior experiences, utilizing each other as a valuable resource for emotional support and knowledge, and the critical timing of the program as participants prepared to move forward in their careers.

Developing Knowledge

In addition to building relationships, participants acquired new knowledge and practiced skills related to various leadership tasks and responsibilities. Multiple opportunities were provided to gain knowledge from peers, broaden perspectives through experiences, and practice

skill application for career advancement. Group discussion posts allowed participants to share their stories and learn from each other. School visits and principal shadowing supported participants in broadening their perspectives and expanding their understanding of the role of the principal. Program participants viewed these experiences as opportunities to learn from models currently serving in the role they hope to acquire. Respondents consistently mentioned guest panels of principals and district-level departments. Eight of nine participants specifically mentioned the principal panels and described them as “fantastic” and “so impactful.” Participants were able to develop knowledge and skills with practical applications both to their current work and future roles.

Aspiring school principals must be prepared to face the many challenges of the principalship. The responsibility for this preparation falls on the school districts (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Unfortunately, there is often a lack of professional development provided by school districts for assistant principals (Eller, 2014). Findings from this case study indicate that participants in the district-provided leadership development program perceived they could build knowledge and skills through various experiences and thus be prepared for future challenges.

Communication is an area of difficulty faced by many school leaders. Fortunately, this is one of the specific areas where participants were able to build leadership knowledge. Communication issues can interfere with building family relationships and become a barrier (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Strong communication skills are essential to school leadership success (Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). However, assistant principals need support developing these skills (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Program participants mentioned the positive influence of learning from panels and question-and-answer opportunities. Patrice explained, “There were some good communication suggestions from a principal panel about just

consistency and communication” and how improving communication skills would build an understanding of your school community. Gaining knowledge from the communications department was explicitly mentioned. Monica also discussed learning strategies for utilizing the district’s communication system from program peers. Additionally, program participants were able to build skills related to using social media to communicate with families and the broader community.

School leaders must serve students, faculty, staff, parents, and the community through their expansive role. Working with this wide range of stakeholders can be challenging (Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). Through department presentations and principal panels, participants in the leadership development program expanded their understanding of working with this diverse group. Participants built skills to prioritize students and collaboratively work with all stakeholders. Debbie recalled, “...the [high school principal] shared a lot about prioritizing your students, even when parents want to be the priority.”

Several participants expressed concern that nothing can truly prepare you for the principalship. Oliver, who has been an assistant principal and a principal, emphasized, “...being an AP does not prepare you to be a principal at all.” Related literature supports this concept. When assistant principals assume the principalship, they are often unprepared for the stress accompanying the role (Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Gentilucci et al., 2018). Therefore, professional learning opportunities should align with realistic expectations and simulate day-to-day responsibilities (Barnett et al., 2012; Hayes, 2019). Field-based experiences such as school visits and shadowing allow aspiring leaders to see real-world leadership in action and should be provided through development programs (Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). Shadowing for assistant principals (Oleszewski et al., 2012) and learning walks (Eller,

2014) are significant in developing leaders. Providing models of successful principals through school visits and shadowing allowed the aspiring principals in this study to see first-hand the actual functioning of the role. Pamela described learning about the challenges from a first-year principal. She recollected, “Like you can’t [*sic*] nothing can really prepare you, and you just have to be ready to go.” Pamela also referenced how she learned about instructional leadership by observing it during the shadowing experience. She explained, “I came and shadowed [principal]. I can very clearly see that [principal] were [*sic*] a different type of leader than me. But we both shared a really strong passion for the instructional aspect.”

The need to know is an assumption of adult learning theory that addresses what, how, and why components of learning (Knowles et al., 2005). This assumption asserts that adult learners need to understand the content that will be addressed and how this content will be delivered in a learning environment (Knowles et al.). In addition to the topics to be covered and the planned learning experiences, Knowles et al. purport that adult learners must understand why learning is necessary. This assumption frames the participants’ discussion of what they hoped to learn from the program, how they thought they would gain knowledge, and their perceived usability of newly acquired understanding.

Although participants did not discuss information provided at the onset of the program to clearly define the content of the academy or the specific delivery methods, they did discuss what they hoped to learn. Participants were eager to learn about interview preparation, a realistic view of the principalship, and the problems and challenges faced by school leaders. Although unsure of the program’s content, Paula hoped it would be a “...well-rounded experience of what I’m going to be dealing with as principal.” The findings show that participants referenced principal panels, school visits, building relationships, creating a professional network, shadowing, and conversations with various leaders as the methods they most looked forward to in the program.

Oliver's thoughts were similar to his peers. When asked what he was most excited about when he was selected, he explained he wanted to see models "...all around the district currently, getting to go shadow, take opportunities to talk to different principals at different levels."

Knowles et al. (2005) assert that adult learners need to understand the why behind a learning experience to establish how the learning will be beneficial. One practical application for identifying the necessity of learning is through self-assessment at the beginning of a learning experience. Although a self-assessment was not utilized, program participants could see the why behind the learning in the program. Program participants mentioned that the academy would address gaps in their knowledge between assistant principal and principal skills. Several respondents discussed how the program built their understanding of district expectations for leaders. These participants felt this understanding would help them be successful principals; therefore, the why for learning was career advancement. Another recommendation from Knowles et al. is to use models of successful application of knowledge to understand better why an adult learner should undertake learning. One of the most frequently mentioned components of the leadership program was the use of principal panels. Respondents highly valued this delivery method because these panels were models of applying leadership knowledge. Participants specifically appreciated the inclusion of former program participants on these panels. The inclusion of former program participants on the panels allowed current program participants to make a direct connection between what they were learning and future applications.

The second assumption of adult learning theory relevant to participants' skill development is orientation to learning. This assumption is concerned with the process of learning through life-centered activities (Knowles et al., 2005). Orientation to learning is less concerned with subject-oriented tasks; instead, it claims that adult learners most effectively acquire

knowledge when it is connected to real-life, problem-centered applications. This study's findings show that acquiring practical skills was essential to participants. Learning practical skills from program peers was often highlighted as valuable in the interviews. School visits also allowed participants to see the application of leadership knowledge in a real-life context. However, the most frequently reported problem-centered learning experience was the mock interviews. Seven of the nine participants discussed the mock interviews and appreciated the opportunity to apply their newly acquired knowledge of interviewing skills to the mock interview scenario.

Participants also mentioned the positive influence of receiving immediate supervisor feedback following the mock interviews. Adult learners can build skills by acquiring knowledge and subsequently having an opportunity to apply it and receive feedback (Nicolaidou et al., 2016).

Through the interviews, it became apparent that participants held the perception that they gained valuable knowledge and skills through the program. They were able to broaden their perspectives by engaging with peers and leaders from a variety of backgrounds. This perspective continued to be developed through school visits and shadowing. Participants placed an exceptionally high value on the knowledge they developed from principal panels and the skills they could practice through mock interviews. Research confirms the need for specific skill development through field experiences and realistic, life-centered application (Barnett et al., 2012; Hayes, 2019; Hayes & Burkett, 2021), such as shadowing (Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). By observing models of successful leaders in various settings, participants understood why they needed to develop leadership knowledge and skills.

Contributing to Self-Concept

Participants shared a variety of reasons for applying for the leadership development program. They consistently expressed being encouraged by current supervisors and other district

leaders to apply. A sense that they were prepared for the next level of leadership and personal growth and a need to assume control of their learning also motivated these aspiring principals. Feelings of honor, self-worth, and value were experienced when they were selected to participate. Participants experienced a positive growth in their confidence through their selection and participation in the program. Findings indicated that the ability of participants to contribute to the knowledge base of the cohort group positively impacted their self-esteem. In addition to positive self-esteem growth, program participants developed self-efficacy about perceived abilities to be successful principals. The development of a “principal lens” was consistently mentioned during the interviews. Participants perceived they were more prepared for the next level of leadership and were able to envision themselves in the principal role as a result of participating in the program.

Voluntary participation in professional learning opportunities results in more positive changes to practice than forced participation (Nicolaidou et al., 2016). While participants stated various reasons for joining the program, all participants self-selected this opportunity. Debbie did not feel pressured to apply for the leadership program but was motivated by others. She explained, “...[district leaders] kept trying to encourage me to just continue my leadership journey.” Although several participants were hopeful the program would lead to promotion, enrollment in this leadership academy is not required for future promotions.

Understanding oneself is critical for influential leaders and adult learners (Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). This concept involves being able to identify your strengths and areas for growth. Debbie addressed this understanding, “How you know your weaknesses. You know how your brain does not work.” Participants consistently described their perception of personal growth in multiple areas due to program participation. These leaders acknowledged gaps in their

skills and hoped that the program would address those gaps to prepare them for their next step in leadership. Patrice was aware of her own needs due to her limited experience. She explained, “I had only been at one school recently, and my elementary experience truly was limited just to one school.” This awareness, or self-discovery, benefits mentoring and support programs (Gumus, 2019).

Program participants consistently identified the reassurance of belonging and the reaffirmation of skills as positive contributors to their self-concept. Patrice emphasized being “authentic to our own leadership style.” Effective professional coaching for assistant principals can positively influence their confidence levels (Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Continuing professional support for beginning principals can enhance their feelings of value by recognizing their individuality (Gumus, 2019). Participants felt valued for the different perspectives and experiences they brought to the program. Pamela concurred with her peers, “...every individual brings something different,” and those differences were appreciated within the program.

Self-efficacy, a belief about one’s competence in performing in a specific situation, is an essential indicator of principal effectiveness (Bauer & Silver, 2017). “A person with the same knowledge and skills may perform poorly, adequately, or extraordinarily depending on fluctuations in self-efficacy thinking” (Bandura, 1993, p. 119). Verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and mastery learning experiences influence self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Verbal persuasion positively influenced participants’ self-efficacy when they were encouraged by other leaders to apply for the program due to their potential. Vicarious learning experiences were provided through school visits, shadowing, and principal panels. These experiences supported program participants' knowledge development and increased their feelings of self-efficacy and preparedness. According to program participants, the most

influential opportunity was the mock interviews. This format provided participants with a learning experience in which they could practice and work towards mastery of interviewing skills. Feedback presented to learners utilizing a positive frame of reference can improve self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Multiple participants mentioned the benefits of receiving direct, immediate feedback following the mock interviews.

Two assumptions of adult learning theory frame participants' experiences in positive self-growth: the learner's self-concept and motivation. The assumption of the learner's self-concept focuses on two constructs: self-directed learning and personal autonomy (Knowles et al., 2005). Self-directed learning occurs when the learner assumes all control of learning. An independent study model is an example of self-directed learning. Although the leadership development program was not self-directed, one participant explained it was "One of the first times I really initiated my leadership journey." This academy did allow adult learners opportunities for personal autonomy. Personal autonomy addresses how adults participate, establish their purpose and goals, and how they take control of their learning (Knowles et al.). Self-identification of needs and collaboration between the teacher and the learner are concepts of personal autonomy. Learners with a stronger feeling of competence and previous experience related to new learning are more likely to self-identify their needs and collaborate with the teacher (Knowles et al.). Most participants felt more confident both by being selected for the program and as a result of program participation. They could identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop confidence in their unique skills and talents. As previously discussed, program participants were consistently encouraged to "be themselves." One participant reported, "I think the program really is built around understanding your why. Why are you getting into the role as a principal? What are your [*sic*] what do you find are your most important values..." Participants also experienced

positive contributions to their self-concept as learners by being able to contribute to the group based on their previous experiences. Learners who connect their previous experience to new content are more likely to engage in learning thoroughly (Knowles et al.).

Motivation is essential to how adults learn (Knowles et al.). Study participants identified a variety of internal motivations for applying to the leadership academy. Internal motivation, such as a desire for increased job satisfaction, improved quality of life, and positive self-esteem, is typically more relevant for adult learners (Knowles et al., 2005). Motivators included feeling ready for the next leadership level, wanting to apply their vision to a school environment, and encouragement from principals and other leaders, leading to feelings of competence and value. Adult learners are motivated by ongoing professional development and growth opportunities that satisfy their natural desire for continuous learning (Knowles et al.). Participants described excitement about the program's opportunities for learning and personal growth. Additionally, adult learners are more motivated to engage with learning when the learning is deemed personally valuable (Knowles et al.). Relevance to current work and future possibilities were consistently described by program participants, supporting the perception that the program material was personally valuable. Motivation for learning is also impacted by the learner's feelings of confidence related to new knowledge and skills (Knowles et al.). The encouragement program participants received from other leaders to apply, the confidence boost they experienced when they were selected, and the reaffirmation of their competence during the program combined to elicit feelings of confidence, positively impacting motivation to learn. The exploration of these three themes and relevant literature, framed by adult learning theory, suggests several recommendations.

Implications

This study examined the components within a leadership development program that participants perceived as influencing their current practices and their feelings of preparedness for the next leadership level. Knowles et al. (2005) six assumptions of adult learning theory framed the study. Data analysis of semi-structured interviews led to the identification of three major themes. Several implications have been identified, connecting research, findings from the study, and adult learning theory.

Implications for Principals

The first recommendation is that all school principals must take an active role in the professional development of assistant principals because they are uniquely situated to provide this type of support. The literature review and the findings of this study substantiate the importance of providing ongoing professional development for school leaders. Program participants continuously highlighted how valuable the relationships and knowledge they gained from principals were. Principals should encourage and support their assistant principals in participating in district-led or university-based professional development programs. If a district or university-based professional development program does not exist, there are strategies that principals can utilize to build capacity for their assistants. Veteran school leaders possess the knowledge, skills, and expertise to serve as mentors, allow developing leaders the opportunity to visit their schools, and provide shadowing experiences. “Given the high turnover of principals, providing assistant principals with ongoing support and development opportunities can have enormous benefits, especially as a way of developing the attitudes and competencies needed to be successful principals.” (Barnett et al., 2012, p. 122). As Paula explained:

It's one of the first things that you can do in order to get consistent leadership in the district. So in order to be able to consistently fill that principal pipeline, you've got to start investing in your leaders from the beginning.

Implications for Districts

The second recommendation focuses on the role of the district in providing support incorporating Knowles's assumptions of adult learning theory. The need to know assumption of adult learning theory is concerned with what, why, and how of learning. Self-assessment is one method for addressing this assumption (Knowles et al., 2005). Leadership development programs should utilize self-assessments to assist learners in identifying the gaps in their knowledge and skills. There was no mention of formal self-assessment from these participants. One respondent stated, "We do not really test adults so unless they are comfortable telling you what they need." When participants are accepted into a leadership development program, self-assessment will allow for reflection and differentiated program planning for leaders.

Self-assessments should also be used for individualized goal setting. Professional development models that incorporate goal setting effectively can contribute to improvements in practice (Hayes & Burkett, 2021; Nicolaidou et al., 2016). When participants were asked about their goals for the program, responses varied, but none identified expected outcomes established by the program or a formal process for setting personal goals. Goal setting encourages adult learners to take ownership of their learning. This ownership positively impacts the learner's sense of personal autonomy and contributes to the learner's self-concept (Knowles et al., 2005).

The third recommendation is for districts to plan multi-year support programs. As documented in the research, opportunities to extend professional learning beyond a one-year program should be considered due to the many challenges and feelings of isolation school

leaders can face. When asked about their interest in future professional learning, several participants were eager to take on the next opportunity, although they were uncertain what that opportunity would be. One respondent described themselves as a lifelong learner; another participant replied, “any and all” when asked what professional learning they would like to seek next. Ongoing professional development would satisfy participants’ natural desire for learning and personal growth, support existing relationships, assist with developing new professional networks, and continue to develop knowledge and skills.

Suggestions for Further Research

One of the limitations of this study was the constraint of time. To conduct the study within an appropriate time frame, participants were interviewed after the conclusion of the program. It would be beneficial to conduct additional research in which leadership development program participants are interviewed at the onset and again after the program. This would allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the motivation and goals of the participants before their exposure to program content. Engaging in multiple interviews over time would also expand the researcher’s exposure to the case and study participants. In qualitative research, the relationship between the researcher and the study participants is influential (Stake, 1995), and a stronger relationship lends additional credibility to the study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

This study was designed to focus on the perceptions of program participants. A qualitative case study designed to include the perceptions of the program developers could be beneficial. This additional perspective would allow for further exploration of the application of adult learning theory to the developmental and planning stages of a leadership program. A comparison between the program developers’ intended outcomes and program participants’ perceptions could provide insights beyond what was learned from solely utilizing participants.

Malcolm Knowles's six adult learning theory assumptions were utilized to frame this research. Knowles introduced the term andragogy in 1968 and continued to refine his understanding of adult learning theory, expanding from four assumptions to six (Knowles et al., 2005). As discussed in Chapter 3, Knowles is a "pioneer of the principles of andragogy" (Black & Earnest, 2009, p. 186), and andragogy is considered to be a pillar of adult learning theory (Merriam, 2001). However, criticism aimed at Knowles's theory claims there is an overemphasis on self-autonomy and personal control of learning without consideration of the context of learning (Merriam, 2003). Hartree (1984) explains that "andragogy emphasizes the autonomy and self-directing nature of the adult" (p. 207). According to the findings of this study, the relationships participants created among themselves, as well as with district leadership, were viewed as one of the most influential components of the program. Future research could utilize a theoretical framework that allows for a more intentional focus on the context and relationships of adult learning within a professional learning environment.

Conclusion

An effective leader's impact on a school's performance is well documented. Principals influence teacher retention, teacher leadership development, and school climate (Georgia Partnership for Excellence, 2019). Quality school leadership also impacts student achievement as principals play a crucial role in school improvement (Fuller & Young, 2009). However, many school leaders report a lack of preparation to assume the principalship and inadequate support once serving in the role (Morgan, 2018; Yavuz & Robinson, 2018). Feelings of stress, loneliness, and isolation are often the result (Bauer & Silver, 2017; Slater et al., 2018). Effective professional learning and induction support for assistant principals and beginning principals can be beneficial (Bertrand, 2018; Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Hayes & Burkett, 2021). Professional development for school leaders can be offered in various formats, including mentoring and

coaching (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). Additionally, experiential learning in the form of field experiences is valuable in providing a realistic view of the principalship to aspiring and beginning leaders (Knowles et al., 2005; Zmeyov, 1998).

One aspiring principal program in a large suburban school district bound this case study. The Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) models for qualitative design were utilized and Knowles et al. (2005) six assumptions of adult learning theory framed the study. Criteria for case selection were established, resulting in the use of a program that provided an appropriately sized participant sample, a defined purpose of preparing leaders for the next level of leadership, and multiple professional learning activities. These criteria provided a case that aligned with the purposes of the study and the guiding research questions.

Criteria were also developed for selecting study participants to fit the general needs of qualitative case studies and the specific needs of this individual study. Participants from the 2022-23 program were invited to participate in the research if they served in a school leadership role in the subsequent year. Of the 16 possible participants, 11 returned the potential participant questionnaire. Ten participants completed the final step of scheduling an interview, with one participant selected for a pilot interview.

A document review was conducted utilizing the description of the program created by the district. This document was analyzed for evidence of Knowles et al. (2005) six assumptions of adult learning theory. Following the document review, semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually using approximately 17 interview questions. The researcher developed and aligned these questions with the study's research questions, relevant literature, and theoretical framework. The interviews ranged from 17 minutes to 35 minutes and were audio recorded. NVivo transcription software was used to transcribe the recordings. Transcripts were compared

with the audio files, and corrections were made to ensure accuracy. Study participants were provided with a copy of their transcript for an opportunity to make corrections. This member checking process increased the internal validity of the study.

A multi-step coding process was applied to participant transcripts. Merriam (1998) suggests a process of coding that begins with inductive analysis and transitions to deductive. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding allowed the data to be thoroughly analyzed, leading to the emergence of three themes: building a collegial network, developing skills, and contributing to self-concept. These themes aligned with Knowles et al. (2005) six adult learning theory assumptions and the study's research questions. Evidence of the six assumptions was found throughout the interview responses, and many program components were perceived as influential on participants' current practices. Program participants built highly valued relationships that provided emotional support and learning opportunities. Additionally, respondents reported positive self-growth related to self-esteem and self-efficacy.

The participants in this study provided valuable insights as to how a leadership development program was able to enhance their current practices, expand their professional network, and prepare them to be successful principals. These leaders were self-aware and forthcoming in discussing their strengths and areas for growth. They were also knowledgeable about school leadership and the relevant professional development needs. Debbie contended, "So it really does, it does require a lot, a lot of people to continue to move people forward." Paula agreed with the importance of having numerous people involved in the process. She proposed, "The more people you know, the more experiences you have, the more well-rounded you are as a leader. And something like the [leadership development program] was definitely going to

prepare me for my next step.” Pamela placed an even higher value on the program and asserted, “I don't think that I would be sitting here if I had never participated in that program.”

Every child deserves a quality education. While many factors impact the education that students receive, “principals have a pronounced, positive effect on the schools they lead. They contribute to important outcomes like student achievement, reduced absenteeism, and teacher retention.” (Grissom et al., 2021, Summary section, para. 2). Unfortunately, principals face many daily challenges, and there are concerns about shortages of school leaders (Bauer & Silver, 2017; Versland, 2018). Investing in developing assistant principals is one opportunity for building the principal pipeline. However, no consistently agreed upon method exists for “how to best prepare and support assistant principals, and how to effectively prepare them for success as principals” (Goldring et al., 2021, p. 1). This study identified promising practices in leadership development that positively influenced aspiring principals' knowledge, skills, and self-concept. With ongoing research and a focus on continuous improvement, effective leadership development programs can be provided to all school leaders, resulting in improved school outcomes.

REFERENCES

- Allen, J.G., & Weaver, R.L. (2014). Learning to lead: The professional development needs of assistant principals. *NCPEA Education Leadership Review*, 15(2), 14-32.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1105575.pdf>
- Allen, S.J. (2007). Adult learning theory & leadership development. *Kravis Leadership Institute, Leadership Review* 7, 26-37.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263491769_Adult_Learning_Theory_and_Leadership_Development
- Anderson, D. W., Krajewski, H. T., Goffin, R. D., & Jackson, D. N. (2008). A leadership self-efficacy taxonomy and its relation to effective leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19, 595–608. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.07.003>
- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational Psychologist*, 28, 117-148. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2802_3
- Barnett, B.G., Shoho, A.R., & Oleszweski, A.M. (2012). The job realities of beginning and experienced assistant principals. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 11(1), 92-128.
<https://10.1080/15700763.2011.611924>
- Bauer, S.C. & Silver, L. (2018). The impact of job isolation on new principals' sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout and persistence. *Journal of Educational Administration* 56(3), 315-331. <https://10.1108/JEA-07-2017-0078>
- Baxter, P. & McMaster, S.J. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 554-559.
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-4/baxter.pdf>

- Bayar, A. (2016). Challenges facing principals in the first year at their schools. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 4(1), 192–199. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1086184>
- Beam, A. P., Claxton, R. L., & Smith, S. J. (2016). Challenges for novice school leaders: Facing today's issues in school administration. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, 27, 145–161. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1094357>
- Berkowitz, S. (1997). Analyzing qualitative data. In J. Frechtling & L. Sharp (Eds.), *User-friendly handbook for mixed method evaluations*. Arlington, VA: Division of Research, Evaluation and Communication, National Science Foundation.
<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/1997/nsf97153/start.htm>
- Bertrand, L., Stader, D., Copeland, S., & Copeland. (2018). Supporting new school leaders through mentoring. *School Leadership Review*, 13(2), 82-94.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1269875.pdf>
- Black, A.M. & Earnest, G.W. (2009). Measuring the outcomes of leadership development programs. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 16(2), 184-196.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1548051809339193>
- Bravender, M., & Staub, N. (2018). Using interactive, problem-based simulations in a mentoring program for novice school leaders. *ICPEL Education Leadership Review*, 19(1), 77-91.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1200809.pdf>
- Brookfield, S. (2000). Chapter 8: Adult cognition as a dimension of lifelong learning. In *Lifelong learning: Education across the lifespan* (pp. 89-101).
- Burkett, J. R. (2021). Next-level leadership: Preparing assistant principals for campus leadership. *Journal of Educational Leadership in Action*, 7(2).
<https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/ela/vol7/iss2/1>

- Clarke, S., Wildy, H., & Styles, I. (2011). Fit for purpose? Western Australian insights into the efficacy of principal preparation. *Journal of Educational Administration, 49*(2), 166–178. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231111116716>
- Cohen, D. & Crabtree, B. (2006). “Qualitative Research Guidelines Project” Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Qualitative Research Guidelines Project | Lincoln & Guba | Lincoln and Guba's Evaluative Criteria (qualres.org) <http://www.qualres.org/HomeLinc-3684.html>
- Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. M. (2018). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 17*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475>
- Craft, H.M., Malveaux, R., Lopez, S., & Combs, P. (2016). The acclimation of new assistant principals. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 1*(2), 9-18. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jsard.v1i2.1914>
- Crawford, M., & Cowie, M. (2011). Bridging theory and practice in headship preparation. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 40*(2), 175–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143211427978>
- De Houwer, J., Barnes-Holmes, D. & Moors, A. (2013). What is learning? On the nature and merits of a functional definition of learning. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review 20*, 631–642. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-013-0386-3>
- DiPaola, M., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003). The principalship at a crossroads: A study of the conditions and concerns of principals. *NASSP Bulletin, 87*(634), 43–65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019263650308763404>

- Duncan, H.E., Range, B., & Scherz, S. (2011). From professional preparation to on-the-job development: What do beginning principals need? *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 6(3), 1-20. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ974249.pdf>
- Duncan, H. E., & Stock, M. J. (2010). Mentoring and coaching rural school leaders: What do they need? *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 18(3), 293–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2010.492947>
- Eller, J. (2014). An evaluation of a development program for new principals. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(4), 956-965. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2010.1190>
- Fuller, E. J., & Young, M. D. (2009). Tenure and retention of newly hired principals in Texas. Austin, TX: University Council for Educational Administration, Department of Educational Administration, University of Texas at Austin
- Gallagher, M.W. (2012). Self-Efficacy. In V.S. Ramachaudran (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of human behavior*, (Vol. 2, pp. 314-32). New York: Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-375000-6.00312-8>
- Gates, S., Baird, M., Master, B., & Chavez-Herrerias, E. (2019). Principal pipelines: A feasible, affordable, and effective way for districts to improve schools. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2666.html
- Gentilucci, J., Denti, L., & Guaglianone, C. (2013). *New principals' perspectives of their multifaceted roles*, 24, 75-85. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1013151.pdf>
- Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. (2019,16th edition). Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2020. <https://gpee.org/ga-partnership-releases-2020-top-ten-issues-to-watch/>
- Gimbel, P., & Kefor, K. (2018). Perceptions of a principal mentoring initiative. *NASSP Bulletin*, 102(1), 22–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636518754405>

- Goldring, E., Rubin, M., & Herrmann, M. (2021). The role of assistant principals: Evidence and insights for advancing school leadership. Study Highlights, The Wallace Foundation.
<https://wallacefoundation.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/the-role-of-assistant-principals-evidence-insights-for-advancing-school-leadership.pdf>
- Grissom, J.A., Egalite, A.J., & Lindsay, C.A. (2021). How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research. The Wallace Foundation.
<https://wallacefoundation.org/report/how-principals-affect-students-and-schools-systematic-synthesis-two-decades-research>
- Gordon, S. P. (2020). The principal development pipeline: A call for collaboration. *NASSP Bulletin*, 104(2), 61–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636520923404>
- Gumus, E. (2019). Investigation of mentorship process and programs for professional development of school principals in the U.S.A.: The case of Georgia. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 7(1), 2.
<https://doi.org/10.17583/ijelm.2019.3718>
- Hartree, A. (1984). Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy: A critique. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 3(3), 203-210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0260137840030304>
- Hayes, S. D. (2019). Using developmental relationships in mentoring to support novice principals as leaders of learning. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 27(2), 190–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2019.1611289>
- Hayes, S. D., & Burkett, J. R. (2021). Almost a principal: Coaching and training assistant principals for the next level of leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*, 31(6), 502-525. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684620912673>

- Hays, D. G. & Singh, A.A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and education settings*. The Guilford Press.
- Hsieh H.F. & Shannon S.E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*. 15(9):1277-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Institute of Education Sciences (n.d.). *Common Core of Data - District Directory Information*. National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?ID2=1301290&details=
- Knowles, M.S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy* (Rev. and Updated.). Association Press. <https://www.collllearning.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-Modern-Practice-of-Adult-Education.pdf>
- Knowles, M.S., Holton, E.F., & Swanson, R.A. (2005). *The adult learner: the definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*. [electronic resource] (6th ed.). Elsevier. <https://tinyurl.com/46mtykct>
- Levin, S., & Bradley, K. (2019). Understanding and addressing principal turnover: A review of the research. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/nassp-understanding-addressing-principal-turnover-review-research-report>
- Maher, C., Hadfield, M., Hutchings, M., & de Eyto, A. (2018). Ensuring rigor in qualitative data analysis: A design research approach to coding combining NVivo with traditional material methods. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918786362>
- Marquardt, M., & Waddill, D. (2004). The power of learning in action learning: a conceptual analysis of how the five schools of adult learning theories are incorporated within the

- practice of action learning. *Action Learning: Research and Practice* 1(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1476733042000264146>
- Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. ASCD.
- Merriam, S.B. (1996). Updating our knowledge of adult learning. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions* 16(3), 136-143.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/chp.4750160303>
- Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2001(89), 3-14.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.3>
- Merriam, S.B. (2003). The changing landscape of adult learning theory. In J. Comings, B. Garner & C. Smith (Eds.), *Review of adult learning and literacy: Connecting research, policy, and practice* (Volume 4, pp. 199-220). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Merriam, S.B. (2004). The role of cognitive development in Mezirow's transformational learning theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55(1), 60-68.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713604268891>
- Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, T. L. (2018). Assistant Principals' Perceptions of the Principalship. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 13(10).
<https://doi.org/10.22230/ijepl.2018v13n10a743>

- Nicolaidou, M., Karagiorgi, Y., & Petridou, A. (2016). Feedback-based coaching towards school leaders' professional development: Reflections from the PROFLEC project in Cyprus. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 5, 20–36.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-03-2015-0011>
- Ng, S., & Szeto, S. E. (2015). Preparing school leaders. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 44(4), 540–557.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143214564766>
- Oleszewski, A., Shoho, A., & Barnett, B. (2012). The development of assistant principals: A literature review. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 50(3), 264-286.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231211223301>
- Patton M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health services research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1189–1208. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10591279/>
- Petridou, A., Nicolaidou, M. and Karagiorgi, Y. (2017) Exploring the impact of professional development and professional practice on school leaders' self-efficacy: A quasi-experimental study. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 28(1), 56-73.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2016.1236734>
- Schechter, C. (2014). Mentoring prospective principals: Determinants of productive mentor–mentee relationship. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 23(1), 52-65.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/105678791402300103>
- Schwandt, T.A., Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (2007). Judging interpretations: But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2007 (114), 11-25.

- Shoho, A. R., & Barnett, B. G. (2010). The realities of new principals: Challenges, joys, and sorrows. *Journal of School Leadership, 20*(5), 561–596.
- Slater, C. L., Garcia Garduno, J. M., & Mentz, K. (2018). Frameworks for principal preparation and leadership development. *Management in Education, 32*(3), 126–134.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020617747611>
- Spillane, J. P., & Lee, L. C. (2013). Novice school principals' sense of ultimate responsibility. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 50*(3), 431–465.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x13505290>
- Srivastava, P., & Hopwood, N. (2009). A practical iterative framework for qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 76-84.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/160940690900800107>
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.
- Stankov, L., Kleitman, S., & Jackson, S.A. (2015). Measures of the trait of confidence. In *Measures of personality and social psychological constructs* (pp. 158-189).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-386915-9.00007-3>
- Taylor, D. C. M., & Hamdy, H. (2013). Adult learning theories: Implications for learning and teaching in medical education: AMEE Guide No. 83. *Medical Teacher, 35*(11), e1561–e1572. <https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159x.2013.828153>
- Taylor Backor, K., & Gordon, S. P. (2015). Preparing principals as instructional leaders. *NASSP Bulletin, 99*(2), 105–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636515587353>
- Tight, M. (2014). *Education for adults: Adult learning and education*. Routledge.

- Tschannen-Moran, M., & McMaster, P. (2009). Sources of self-efficacy: Four professional development formats and their relationship to self-efficacy and implementation of a new teaching strategy. *The Elementary School Journal, 110*, 228–248.
- Versland, T. M. (2018). Principal efficacy: Implications for rural “grow your own” leadership programs. *The Rural Educator, 35*(1). <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v35i1.361>
- Versland, T.M. & Erickson, J.L. (2017). Leading by example: A case study of the influence of principal self-efficacy on collective efficacy. *Cogent Education, 4*(1) <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1286765>
- Wang, F. (2022). Job demands amid work intensity: British Columbia school administrators’ perceptions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership 50*(6), 1013-1031. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220957331>
- Wildy, H., Clarke, S., Styles, I., & Beycioglu, K. (2010). Preparing novice principals in Australia and Turkey: How similar are their needs? *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, 22*(4), 307–326. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-010-9106-y>
- Williams, M. & Moser, t. (2019). The art of coding and thematic exploration in qualitative research. *International Management Review, 15*(1), [imr-v15n1art4.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-010-9106-y) (imrjournal.org)
- Yavuz, O., & Robinson, Q. L. (2018). Exploring aspiring school leaders’ perception of preparedness on four leadership domains. *Education Reform Journal, 3*(2), 59-77. <https://doi.org/10.22596/erj2018.0302.59.77>
- Zepeda, S. J., Parylo, O., & Bengtson, E. (2014). Analyzing principal professional development practices through the lens of adult learning theory. *Professional Development in Education, 40*(2), 295–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2013.821667>

Zmeyov, S.I. (1998). Andragogy: Origins, developments and trends. *International Review of Education*, 44(1), 103-108. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3445079>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Email Script for Study Recruitment

Email script for participants of aspiring principals' leadership development program for selected case. All participants from the 2022-2023 cohort will receive the following email with a link for the questionnaire for possible dissertation study participation. Although the informed consent form will not be required to be completed in conjunction with the questionnaire, it will be shared in the email to provide potential participants with as much information as possible.

Dear School Leader,

I am contacting you because you are a member of the 2022-2023 Aspiring Principals Academy. I am in the process of completing a study for the Ed.D. program at Georgia State University. Conducting this study has been approved by the Cobb County School District IRB process (approval documentation is attached). The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of school leaders in a leadership development program, and I am recruiting members of the 2022-2023 Aspiring Principals Academy as study participants.

Please use the link below to complete the Questionnaire for Possible Dissertation Study Participation. Completion of this survey is not a commitment on your part to participate in the study. Completion of the survey only indicates your interest in being considered for participation.

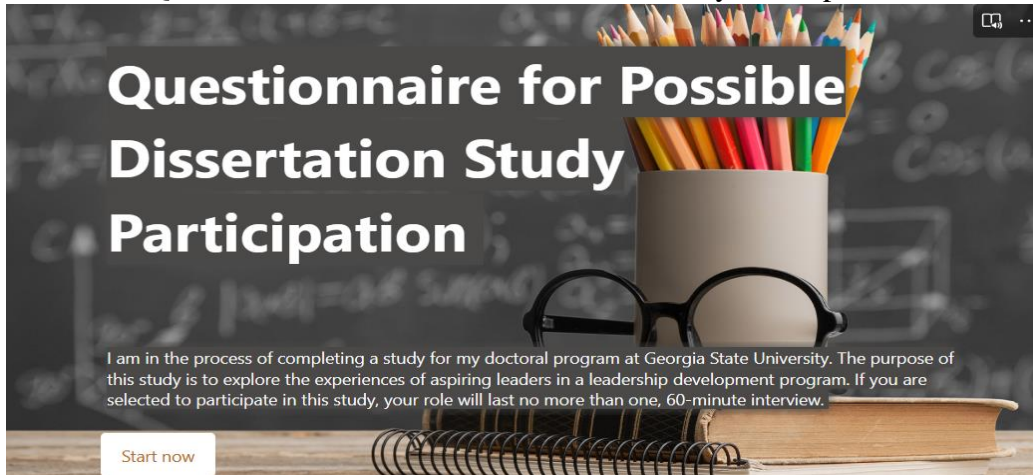
The Georgia State University Informed Consent form is attached to this email. Please do not complete the form at this time. The form is included in order to provide you with additional details regarding study participation. If you are selected and agree to participate, the Informed Consent form will be provided to you at the time of selection.

Please contact me if you have any questions:

Jquinn6@student.gsu.edu

Thank you for your consideration,

Jenny Douglas

APPENDIX B**Questionnaire for Possible Dissertation Study Participation****Questionnaire for Possible Dissertation Study Participation**

* Required

1. Last Name *

Enter your answer

2. First Name *

Enter your answer

3. Email *

Enter your answer

4. Phone number

Enter your answer

5. How would you describe your race/ethnicity? *

Enter your answer

6. How would you describe your gender? *

7. How many years have you been employed in education? *

8. How many years have you been employed in a leadership position in education? *

9. What is your current leadership position? *

10. What is your current school level? *

Elementary School

Middle School

High school

Other

11. Have you participated in any additional leadership development program(s) outside of your district provided program? Examples: Metro RESA, university provided *

Yes

No

Branching: Only “Yes” answers to question 11 will lead to question 12:

12. If you have participated in an additional leadership development program outside of your district provided program, please describe the additional program.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Georgia State University

Informed Consent

Title: Supporting School Leaders: A Case Study to Explore Leadership Development Through the Lens of Adult Learning Theory

Principal Investigator: Dr. Nicholas Sauers

Student Principal Investigator: Jenny Douglas

Introduction and Key Information

You are invited to take part in a research study. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in the study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of aspiring leaders in a leadership development program.

Your role in the study will last no more than one, 60-minute interview, a 15 minute review of interview transcript, and a 15 minute follow-up conversation as needed.

Participating in this study will not expose you to any more risks than you would experience in a typical day.

This study is not designed to benefit you. However, I hope to gain information about leadership development programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of aspiring leaders in a leadership development program.

You are invited to take part in this research study because you are:

- A program participant from the most recent year the leadership development program was implemented.
- Serving in a school leadership role in the subsequent school year.

A total of 16 people will be invited to take part in this study.

Procedures

If you decide to take part, you will:

- Respond to the email invitation with options of days and times for you to be interviewed. Determine a location that works best for you to be interviewed.
- Be interviewed by Jenny Douglas for 1 hour of time; the interview will be audio recorded.
- Review and verify the accuracy of your interview, which should take no more than 15 minutes.
- Be available for a brief follow-up conversation to clarify any questions. This conversation will take no more than 15 minutes.
- Participating in this study should take no more than 1.5 hours for the interview, review of transcripts, and follow-up conversation if needed.
- Responses collected from the questionnaire will be included in the study results.

Future Research

The researcher will remove information that may identify you and may use your data for future research. If I do this, I will not ask for any additional consent from you.

Risks

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. No injury is expected from this study, but if you believe you have been harmed, contact Jenny Douglas as soon as possible. Georgia State University and the research team have not set aside funds to compensate for any injury.

Benefits

This study is not designed to benefit you personally. Overall, I hope to gain information about the experiences of aspiring leaders in a leadership development program.

Alternatives

The alternative to taking part in this study is to not take part in the study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. You may refuse to take part in the study or stop at any time.

Confidentiality

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

- Jenny Douglas (student principal investigator) and Nicholas Sauers (principal investigator)
- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use a pseudonym that you select rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and on a fingerprint and password-protected computer. I will keep a copy of the audio recording on the fingerprint and password protected computer until it has been transcribed and you have verified the accuracy. Upon your verification of the transcription's accuracy, the audio file will be permanently deleted from the computer. When I present or publish the results of this study, I will not use your name or other information that may identify you.

Contact Information

Contact Jenny Douglas at jquinn6@student.gsu.edu or Nicholas Sauers at nsauers@gsu.edu

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu.

Consent

I will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX D

Interview Question	Research Question	Adult Learning Theory
How long have you been in leadership? What do you enjoy the most about your job?		
Give me an example of how you thought the program would make you an even better leader.	RQ1 & 3	The Need to Know
How did you think this program would build your leadership skills?	RQ1 & 3	The Need to Know
When you were selected for the program, what were you most excited about?	RQ1 & 3	The Need to Know
How did you feel about being selected for this program?	RQ1	The Learners' Self-Concept
Tell me about a program experience in which you had choice or differentiated experiences were provided.	RQ1	The Learners' Self-Concept
Tell me about collaboration with your colleagues in the program.	RQ2	Role of the Learners' Experiences
Describe something you learned from a colleague.	RQ2	Role of the Learners' Experiences
How did your success as an assistant principal prepare you for this program?	RQ2	Role of the Learners' Experiences
How do you feel this program has prepared you for your next step in leadership?	RQ3	Readiness to Learn

Describe a particular program experience that has helped prepare you.	RQ3	Readiness to Learn
Tell me about something you learned in the program that you've already implemented or that you'd like to implement in the future.	RQ2 & 3	Orientation to Learning
How were you able to connect what you learned in the program to your daily work?	RQ2 & 3	Orientation to Learning
Tell me about your decision to participate in this program.	RQ1	Motivation
What future professional learning experiences do you hope to participate in?	RQ1	Motivation
Is there anything else you would like me to know about your program experience?		