Influencing the School Leadership Pipeline: The Attributes and Readiness of Principals to Mentor Their Assistant Principals

Megan C. Carrero

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INFLUENCING THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PIPELINE: THE ATTRIBUTES AND READINESS OF PRINCIPALS TO MENTOR THEIR ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

By

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______________________________________________

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Education Administration

College of Education

University of South Carolina

2022

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DEDICATION

Joseph, William, and James

Being a wife to Joseph and a mother to William and James comes before anything else. Joseph, when you promised “to love and to cherish,” you meant it, and you are the greatest love I could’ve ever imagined. I will never come close to repaying you for your patience, kindness, love, and grace you have shown me throughout our entire marriage and over the past five years of this doctoral journey. To my sons, William and James, being your mother is the greatest joy of my life. May you always know that Mama works hard to make you proud.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my dear friend, colleague, and closest ally - Jonathan Wilburn, the ups and downs of school leadership are all the better with your willingness to laugh with me and pray for me along the way. May you always know how much you have taught me as we “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly” (Micah 6:8).

Many ask how I survive and thrive in a school leadership role. It is without a doubt the fact that I have the privilege of working alongside the most dedicated and committed faculty and students. To my Fulmer Falcons, both students and adults, I am forever indebted to you and will forever be grateful for your kindness, compassion, and encouragement. When I think of integrity, passion, the relentless pursuit of excellence, and persistence in the face of adversity, I think of each of you.

At the culmination of this journey, I will join an esteemed group of brilliant minds in my friends and colleagues who have experienced this same academic rigor with great success. To Dr. Dixon Brooks, I am forever grateful for the chance you took on me at a very young age. Your willingness to support, encourage, and motivate me will remain near and dear to me. It is my sincere hope that you know how inspirational you have been to me in my professional capacity and throughout this research process. I will always welcome your challenging my beliefs about how to best serve students. To Dr. Bill James, you have always had my back without question, and I will remain grateful for your confidence in me. To Dr. Angela Cooper, you are an example of all that I aspire to
be in a woman and professional. To Dr. Melissa Baker, I am blessed to have your expertise and friendship in my world. Your willingness to support not only our school community but this doctoral journey has been integral to our success. To my dissertation chair and advisor, Dr. Katie Cunningham, I am forever grateful for the amount of faith you have placed in me throughout my graduate studies. Your feedback, willingness to work around my commitments, and encouragement will remain with me. To my committee Dr. Suzy Hardie, Dr. Peter Moyi, and Dr. Payal Shah, your feedback and critique has not only influenced this dissertation but will remain with me as a researcher for many years to come.

To my family, it is my hope that I have made you proud. My Mama and Daddy have instilled values in me that have made me the person I am today - work hard, be grateful, make no excuses, and believe in a greater reward. Since I was a little girl, your sacrifices so that I could have opportunities have not gone unnoticed, and the fact that you have always wanted more for me than you ever had for yourselves is not lost on me. Your example has shaped me into the woman I am today, and I hope to carry your legacy as supportive and loving parents. To my father and mother inlaw, Jimmy and Maria, thank you for all that you do in the large and small acts of love and kindness to our family during the many late nights of class and writing. This process took teamwork, and I can’t think of a better team than mine.
ABSTRACT

Despite the complexities and challenges faced by principals on a daily basis, the literature posits that mentoring can be impactful to the individual mentee, as well as the potential benefits to the system in which they serve (Gross, 2009). While the benefits of mentoring are reviewed from the perspective of psychosocial development (Mertz, 2004), professional development (Gray et al., 2007), career development (Williams et al., 2009), the topic of readiness for principal mentoring is lacking in the literature. This study is a qualitative interview study conducted with five middle school principals and five middle school assistant principals in South Carolina. The study explores the attributes of principals who demonstrate readiness for mentoring, their self perceptions, and the perceptions of assistant principals.

My research goal is to contribute to developing and enhancing the principalship pipeline for local and state education agencies through on-the-job support and mentoring. As many schools and communities struggle to staff schools with highly qualified school leaders, this study seeks to serve as an impetus for intervention through mentoring relationships between assistant principals and principals. In response to Title II, Part A of The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states have the option of setting aside a discretionary 3% of Title II, Part A funds as outlined in ESSA to support the professional growth and development of principals, in order to retain them in schools while supporting their leadership skills in order to provide high quality instructional programming for
students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This study will provide research, practice, and policy recommendations for a mentoring framework to support in-service and aspiring principals at district and state level.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPLE</td>
<td>Assistant Principal Program for Leadership Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>Building Instructional Capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEEL</td>
<td>Center for Executive Education Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAPP</td>
<td>Developing Aspiring Principals Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFAMGR</td>
<td>National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PADEPP</td>
<td>Program for Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Principal Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIP</td>
<td>Principals Induction Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCAMLE</td>
<td>South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCASA</td>
<td>South Carolina Association of School Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCDE</td>
<td>South Carolina Department of Education</td>
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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Forbes Magazine published that the School Principal was the “Happiest Job in America.” After surveying 25,000 professionals over the course of two years, the magazine ranked the principalship the happiest job based on the following dynamics: person one works for, people one works with, support one receives, rewards one receives, growth opportunities available, company culture, and the way one works and handles task (Adams, 2015). After reading this article, two questions remain: (1) Why do principals leave their roles? and (2) What types of support or opportunities would encourage them to stay in their role? While little quantitative research has been conducted, the qualitative finding points to the majority of principalship turnover being attributed to the frustration created with little or lack of growth in struggling schools (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Principal and teacher retention have been directly related to the “collaboration and cohesiveness” that is influenced by the principal. Additionally, the assistant principal role has traditionally been the training ground for aspiring principals, thus making this research study impactful to how to support, mentor, and develop aspiring principals.

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter discusses the problem the dissertation study aimed to address: the lack of mentoring as a tool for principal preparation and support. The purpose of the study is to explore the attributes and readiness of in-service principals to mentor their
current assistant principals as a means of preparation for the principalship. The research questions guide the methodology of the study. Definitions, delimitations and limitations, and situated knowledge and assumptions, and significance of the study are discussed. The chapter will conclude with an integration of Mezirow’s (1978a, 1978b, 1985) transformative learning theory and Bandura’s (1989a, 1989b) social cognitive theory as theoretical frameworks guiding the study.

Research Statement

Prior research suggests that the current reality of school principals engaging in a complex role is that they are turning over at an alarming rate with evidence to suggest that support is needed to recruit and retain the next generation of school leaders (Gross, 2009). Three defining characteristics of the role of the principal have served as integral to the turnover process to include lack of autonomy (Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2010), relationships with peers, district leaders, and subordinates (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012), and an overwhelmed demand for the moving target of responsibilities and complexities of the job (Rangel, 2018). Despite numerous obstacles, research also suggests mentoring as a means of preparation and inservice support to support aspiring and novice principals (Mertz, 2004; Ragin & Verbos, 2007).

The nationwide turnover of principals at schools with large representation of economically disadvantaged students and minority students is evident in the 16-52% likelihood of principals leaving their position after the first year in the role (Rangel, 2018). While community demographics remain controlled in a quantitative study conducted by Branch et al. (2009) in Texas, a principal’s effectiveness yielded a higher retention rate after 4 years on a high poverty campus of 76.55%. Loeb et al. (2010)
reviewed the findings of studies conducted in several states and concluded that the negative school climates and federal accountability sanctions were the primary reason for principal departure only to be replaced temporarily, creating another disruption in the leadership tenure of the school. Turnover is more evident when principals move from schools with low income, minoritized students to school communities with higher income students, thus placing the burden on economically disadvantaged schools and communities (Clotfelter et al., 2006).

**Research Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to determine the attributes of principal mentors and the readiness of in-service principals to mentor their current assistant principals as they aspire to be principals. The attributes of principals who demonstrate readiness to mentor is explored as the literature suggests that effective mentors improve through psychosocial support, help their mentees develop in their career, and support their mentee’s advancement (Williams et al., 2009). Principal mentoring becomes a critical component of principal development and support as local school districts and states respond to the recruitment and retention of principals, as well as policies that guide the development of school leaders.

For the purpose of this study, I will utilize the following research questions to guide inquiry into the attributes and readiness of principals to mentor their current assistant principals:

**Research Question 1.** What type of attributes are evident in principals who demonstrate readiness for mentoring aspiring principals?

**Subquestion 1.** What attributes are identified as common strengths and areas of growth for principals to demonstrate readiness for mentoring?
Research Question 2. How do self perceptions of principal readiness for mentoring compare to the perceptions of their mentee assistant principals?

Mentoring in a school setting is typically composed of teacher mentors with early career teacher mentees. These mentoring relationships usually have a structured approach, desired outcomes, and a timeline for the outcomes that is based on an evaluation cycle (Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000). There are 6 types of mentoring that are detailed in the literature and outlined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Mentoring</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual mentoring can be described as informal or formal mentoring and as a traditional one-to-one format building a relationship to support career trajectory and psychosocial well-being (Kram, 1985) (Allen &amp; O’Brien, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Group mentoring polyads may be represented within 3 frameworks: peer group mentoring (PGM), one-to-many mentoring (OTMM), and many-to-one mentoring (MTOM) (Bozeman &amp; Feeney, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Mentoring is provided to the entirety of a team with a focus on teamwork, collaboration, and outcomes of the group as a whole. Feedback is given based on the outcomes of the entirety of the team based on its objectives (Kozlowski et al., 1996).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>The formation of a relationship where the mentor and mentee are of a similar level of experience and are paired together either formally or informally to fulfill a need (Terrien et al., 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual</td>
<td>Similar in nature to face to face mentoring, virtual mentoring is defined as two professionals working together in different geographic locations in an electronic format (Owens, 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>The formation of a mentoring relationship where knowledge is not a “one way street” (Greengard, 2002) where senior level professionals are paired with junior level professionals who are acting as the mentor to their senior colleague (Murphy, 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Informal mentoring is also commonly observed and experienced based on commonalities and mutual experiences where the mentor is able to provide the mentee with early career guidance and support (Kram, 1985).

Early career support for educators is the primary objective of mentoring (Wallace Foundation, 2019). Because socialization predicts a reduction in stress and overall burnout of school principals (Beausaert et al., 2016), mentoring becomes an integrated support for the psychosocial and career development and advancement of aspiring and in-service principals (Deptula & Williams, 2017; Ragin & Verbos, 2007). Formal mentoring was identified as a serial socialization tactic where practicing leaders enhanced the talent pool by seeking out and mentoring future school leaders (Bengtson et al., 2013). Social support as a means of stress reduction can be captured through the process of mentoring, in order to support aspiring and novice principals and achieve bidirectional growth for the mentee and mentor (Bonzionelos, 2004). Additionally, empirical evidence suggests that a principal’s self-efficacy is vital to their sustainability, adaptability, and flexibility in meeting the increased demands of their role (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). To this end, mentoring has shown to increase an aspiring principal’s self-efficacy and provide an in-service principal satisfaction as they become teachers of a new generation of principals (Daresh & Playko, 1993).

The purpose of this research is to use qualitative evidence to identify readiness of principals to mentor their assistant principals as they aspire to become principals. The readiness of the principal to mentor was explored to determine not only the skills but attributes they possess to elicit a positive mentoring relationship with their assistant principal. The exploration of the readiness of a principal to serve as a mentor is a gap
that exists in the literature. The study addresses strengths, weaknesses, experiences, and self perceptions of principal mentors that present both challenges and opportunities in the mentoring process. The perceptions of the principals’ readiness for mentoring were compared to the perceptions of assistant principals to gain a greater understanding of the needs of assistant principals who aspire to be principals, and how to prepare their principal for mentoring. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) detailed the importance of increasing self-efficacy in order to improve leadership in a school environment, thus emphasis must be placed on developing the self-efficacy of the principal and aspiring principal in the mentoring process in the study.

**Rationale for the Study**

There are numerous definitions of mentoring in the literature. Despite the complexities and lack of clarity in defining the broad concept of mentoring, Mertz (2004) provides the distinction between a generic, helpful relationship. Mertz (2004) goes on to discuss the lack of clarity in the research and the distinguishing characteristics of mentorship to include psychosocial development, professional development, and career advancement versus a generic, helpful relationship. As scholars continue to intentionally define mentoring, it is important to note a difference in the field between two concepts that are often interchanged: mentoring and coaching. Unlike coaching, which is defined by the formal relationship between a client and trained, compensated coach for the purpose of meeting long-term needs, mentoring focuses on a loosely structured relationship between a senior ranking mentor and junior ranking mentee for the purpose of support and emotional encouragement (Wallace Foundation, 2019). This study will provide a link between the readiness and attributes of mentors for the purpose of
supporting aspiring principals in the context of the complex educational system and school environment.

The role of the school principal has evolved over the past two decades from primarily a managerial role of coordinating buses, school cleanliness, ordering supplies, and handling personnel issues. In recent decades, these responsibilities are coupled with instructional leadership and a knowledge of curriculum, instruction, data analysis, and how to motivate stakeholders to work towards the school’s vision. This leads to an average of ten plus hours of exhaustive work per day for the principal (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). As principals gain experience in managing these responsibilities, the research indicates they typically make a more positive impact on student achievement within their first three years in the role, but their impact becomes more recognized after five years. The Wallace Foundation (2012) suggests that the five year threshold allows principals the opportunity to seize and develop consistent practices, procedures, and programs. With consistent practices, procedures, and programs, principals are more likely to recruit and retain effective teachers, reduce student disciplinary offenses and suspensions, and increase student achievement. Each facet of school improvement are strong indicators of raising student achievement. Unfortunately, the dynamics of challenging schools, districts, and communities create a roadblock in retaining principals who influence these major factors of school achievement (Hull, 2012).

The dynamics of challenging schools and leadership contexts influences five specific causes of stress (Table 1.2) in new school leaders in particular, were addressed in a synthesis of research conducted by Lashway (2003) include:
### Table 1.2

**Causes of New Principal Stress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>The principal is asked to have a working knowledge of managerial and leadership tasks from safety and security to instruction and accountability. For most principals this is developed with experience and presents as wisdom. It is unlikely that an aspiring or novice principal has experienced the “balancing act” of the responsibilities of the role (Gross, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Having no job-alike colleagues in a school environment presents challenges for new principals as they lack access to collaboration and the collegiality of job-alike colleagues. Isolation is often “hard-wired” into the role on a district level if the opportunities for collaboration with other principals are limited (Gross, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>The ability to develop relationships with multiple stakeholders is a key attribute of successful principals (Marzano, 2005), with most principals possessing positive interpersonal skills (Rangel, 2018). In short, the same building of relational capacity that influenced the principal’s promotability often leaves them feeling lonely (Gross, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Crow and Matthews (1998) describe the two questions of new principals: 1. How are things done? and 2. How are things done here? Preparation of principals for the specific context of the variability in school environments is a challenge as schools are not “cookie cutter” (Gross, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Conflict</td>
<td>Gross and Shapiro (2004) detail the conflicting visions of schools and districts, as well as differing beliefs and philosophies of school improvement. Subsequently, the school, district, and state’s accountability models may lack clarity and alignment (Gross, 2009).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly 200,000 of the 3.5 million teachers nationwide have completed coursework and/or earned graduate degrees required by their respective states to attain the proper certification to become a principal, and while the assistant principal roles have been the traditional training ground for most principals, districts nationwide are seeking more creative main places to developing leadership talent, in preparation for the
principalship (Bain & Company, 2013). As the number of certified candidates has increased, so has the number of institutions of higher education with graduate programs to attain principalship certification increased from 375 in 2000 to 585 in 2013 (UCEA, 2013). Over the past four years in the state of Texas, almost 7,000 educators have attained principalship certification. Essentially, every school administrator in Texas could be replaced with a recent graduate of a principal preparation program. Of all teachers in the state of Georgia, 3,200 hold principalship certification, yet do not hold a formal administrative role in a school. With this being said, the quantity of applicants has been satisfied; however, the struggle of recruiting qualified applicants continues to surface in most school districts throughout the country, making it more critical to develop assistant principals into building level leaders (SREB, 2016). At any level of education, the focus on preparation and development continues to be at the forefront of education and the principalship is no different.

The Wallace Foundation outlined five key functions of principal leadership: shaping a vision of academic success for all students that is based on high expectations, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school’s vision, improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and for students to learn at their best, and managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement (2011). Essentially, the principal has a hand in overseeing all major and minor functions of a school, while directly influencing the teachers’ level of instruction and indirectly influencing the student learning process. This report also suggests that the Principal sets the culture and climate of the school through expectations for teachers’ professional behaviors, providing
access to ongoing learning for teachers, and creating and sustaining an environment that is safe, welcoming, and student-centered. Among these expectations, it is important for the Principal to have a handle on the culture of the school, which is a very powerful and intangible set of beliefs that drives the school toward or away from its vision. In an article written by the NAESP (National Association of Elementary School Principals), "leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about establishing agreed upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions" (Connelly, et al., 2010, p. 4).

As the Wallace Foundation (2012) expresses, the roles and responsibilities of the Principal are complex, challenging, and pressure-filled. Numerous bodies of research indicate that turnover or churn in principals takes place in schools with a larger percentage of students from poverty where strong, consistent leadership is the most needed. "A 10 percent reduction in principal turnover in high-poverty districts—where 27 percent of principals leave their schools annually—along with an increase in principal effectiveness, could add $30,024.07 to a student's lifetime earning potential, according to the report. Without that frequent turnover, students in a 72,000-student district would have contributed $469 million in taxable earnings to local tax collectors, according to the Churn Report" (School Leaders Network, 2015). To bring this information to scale, the average enrollment of school districts in South Carolina is 7,627 students, according to a recent study by the Education Oversight Committee (2013). This would equate to a loss of $49.6 million in taxable wages for students in South Carolina. This statistic alone defines the end result of our task as educators, which is to prepare students with reading,
writing, mathematical problem-solving skills, and career skills to be successful in the current job market where there are higher needs. The efficiency of these tasks is hindered by the turnover in school leadership.

The Churn report also communicates that the Principal accounts for almost 25% of a school’s achievement, indicating that the Principal matters in the overall effectiveness, which defines the overall effectiveness of a school and district as measured by their performance in reading, writing, mathematics, and graduation rate (School Leaders Network, 2015).

The Atlas, a collaboration with PolicyLink and the University of Southern California’s Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) concluded that 42.62% of students of color were enrolled in high poverty schools, while only 7.64% of non-Hispanic white students were enrolled in high poverty schools (2014). The research supports that educational gaps exist in schools where students from low income families are enrolled with peers of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. These gaps perpetuate the growing achievement gap between Kindergarten and Fifth Grade, with students being one standard deviation behind their peers who do not live in poverty by middle school. The cycle of students from poverty typically being less prepared for school is compacted with the statistical evidence of inexperienced principals transitioning at a high rate out of the profession or to a more affluent school, and the research associated with this turnover perpetuates a less than desirable situation for schools with higher poverty indices.

The preparation of school leaders in institutions of higher education remains an area of focus, despite the onus of embedded job support being placed on states and local school districts. Since 2014, institutions of higher education such as the University of
Missouri - St. Louis in partnership with non-profit organizations, such as New Leaders, have redesigned their principal preparation programs, stating they were “stuck in the past.” Knowing that schools in the surrounding St. Louis had challenges, UMSL overhauled their preparation program to streamline their program into six innovations to include grounding program standards that are specific to their institution, admitted candidates who demonstrated a commitment to research-based instruction that seeks to improve student learning, coursework that is designed with a strong focus on school leadership, opportunities for authentic leadership experiences during their program, experiencing rigorous assessments during their coursework, and having exposure to mentorship from current principals (Keleman & Fenton, 2016). Through outside funding, this preparation has been designed with the needs of students in mind and allows aspiring leaders the opportunity to leave their formal positions and take part in a six month internship that allows for more relevant and authentic leadership experiences in the local school district. Much like any internship as most teachers, school counselors, etc. experience, this program seeks to bridge talent with experience. Examples such as this seek to break the mold of knowing things versus being able to do things (Davis & Leon, 2011).

While this method of preparation may not be the most practical for working professionals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 2002, 2017) makes the recommendation in their position statement on the national principal shortage to decrease the gap between principal preparation and practice. The clinical preparation of school leaders should point to the critical competencies of developing school leaders to include instructional leadership, teacher quality, and influencing student achievement.
Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the development and enhancement of the principalship pipeline for local and state education agencies through on-the-job support and mentoring. As many schools and communities struggle to staff schools with credential school leaders who possess effective leadership skills and attributes. This study seeks to serve as an impetus for intervention through mentoring relationships between assistant principals and principals. In addition to the need to prepare, support, and develop novice school leaders, the literature lacks sufficient research on understanding in-service principals’ readiness to mentor the next generation of principals.

Mentoring is defined as the relationship between a principal mentor and their mentee who is an assistant principal. For the purpose of this study, mentoring is defined as role modeling (Mertz, 2004), which allows for leadership identity development (Weinberg, 2019), opportunities for reflection (Browning, 2017), the increase of a principal’s self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004), and career development and advancement planning and goal setting (Williams et al., 2009). Effective mentoring is defined by a synergistic co-mentoring (Deptula & Williams, 2017) concept, where positive relational capacity is foundational to the learning of both the mentor and mentee. Additionally, effective mentoring is evident when there is not only learning value for both parties, but established learning goals and a commitment to support are evident for the mentor and mentee.

“Principals’ sense of efficacy has been difficult to capture” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The measurement of principals’ self efficacy is typically measured through quantitative inquiry and fails to address the level of the leaders’ efficacy and
strength of efficacy beliefs. Bandura (2000) stated that “when faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have strong belief in the capabilities redouble their effort to master the challenge” (p. 120). This study will seek to address the gaps in exploring the efficacy and beliefs of principals in their perceived mastery of specific aspects of school leadership (e.g., instructional leadership, resource management, developing school culture, community engagement, etc.) (Marzano, 2005). Additionally, this study will explore the attributes of leaders that demonstrate readiness to develop mastery in their assistant principals through mentoring. In short, the attributes and strengths of principals and how they impart their strengths through identified attributes were explored.

In addition to the practical goal of influencing change in the principal pipeline, this study seeks to inform policy making at the federal and state levels. At the time of the enactment of ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015), 70% of states invested little to no money in the leadership growth of school level leaders (Council for Chief State School Officers, 2016). In response to this, states have the option of setting aside a discretionary 3% of Title II, Part A funds as outlined in ESSA to support the professional growth and development of principals, in order to retain them in schools while supporting their leadership skills in order to provide high quality instructional programming for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).
Theoretical Framework

Transformative Learning Theory

Being committed to mentoring, providing experiential learning, supportive dialogue, and opportunities for reflections allows the mentor to reflect, transform their thinking, and potentially shift their beliefs (Gross, 2009). Mezirow’s Transformative Learning theory (1985) seeks to explain how learners shape their views and beliefs through critical reflection. The learning that takes place allows the learner to evaluate their past ideas and understandings, thus shifting their world views (Kitchenham, 2008). Based on the influence of Habermas (1985), Mezirow adapted his initial theory to more clearly define the adult learning taking place through transformation. In doing so, Mezirow’s initial three types of learning (1978a & 1978b) were adapted to: 1. Instrumental learning, 2. Dialogic learning, and 3. Self-reflective learning (1985). Subsequently, three learning schemes were also developed: 1. Learning within meaning schemes, 2. Learning new meaning schemes, and 3. Learning through meaning transformation. Learning meaning within schemes works with the learner’s present meaning “by expanding upon, contemplating, and revising their present systems of knowledge.” Learning a new meaning scheme takes place when a learner “acquires a new set of meaning schemes within the learner’s meaning perspective.” Learning through meaning transformation occurs when a learner “encounters a problem that cannot be resolved through present meaning schemes, so the resolution comes through a redefinition of the problem” (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 111).

The application of this theory allows the researcher to better understand the learning that is taking place through critical reflection in a mentoring relationship. A
study conducted by D’Andrea (1986) revealed that teachers found that reflective activities were often preceded by negative experiences, relational capacity was developed by ongoing dialogue, emotions and intuition were salient themes in reflection, and that “readiness was a prerequisite for change and the transcending nature of learning.” Prior to this study, Gehrel (1983) explored creating significant learning experiences for elementary school principals. Similar to the findings of D’Andrea (1986), Gehrel (1983) discovered that intense emotions or experiences to be the predecessor for reflection, the necessity of relationships, and compassion and change as the result of a transformation.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Bandura’s social cognitive theory assumes that perceived self efficacy is a pivotal factor for human agency. “In the social cognitive view people are neither driven by inner forces or automatically shaped and controlled by external stimuli. Rather, human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocity or reciprocal causation model in which behavior, cognitive, and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other” (Bandura, 1986, p. 18). During his initial construction of theory, 4 constructs were devised to influence the social cognitive theory (1977): 1. Direct experience, 2. Observation, 3. Modeling, and 4. Self-regulatory processes. Allowing a learner direct experience, opportunities for observation, and modeling are critical to the success of mentoring. Learners utilize knowledge gained from direct experiences to drive their behavior, and positive and negative reinforcements shape their behavior.

As the learner engages in the process of critical reflection, Bandura’s complimentary theory of self efficacy (1977, 1986, 1997) reflects the belief of confidence
in one’s abilities to internally motivate and self lead. Although confidence and self efficacy are explored hand in hand, there are theoretical differences in the two constructs (Cramer et al., 2009). Self efficacy is defined by a person’s belief systems and their behaviors prior to taking action (Bandura, 1997); whereas, self confidence is a person’s degree of certainty in outcomes (Brewer et al., 2005). Although both constructs achieve significant value in leadership preparation, self efficacy is a more influential determinant of behavior and change, which allows for a more focused target for preparation (Cramer et al., 2009).

Bandura (1997) constructed five modalities of influence: 1. Mastery experiences, 2. Vicarious experiences, 3. Verbal persuasion, 4. Physiological and affective states, and 5. Integration of efficacy of information. Self-efficacy assumes that an individual will put more effort in complex tasks when they possess beliefs that they can achieve certain outcomes. Capa-Aydin et al. (2018) described an individual’s beliefs as actively demonstrating a choice in what to pursue, their persistence in difficult situations, their willingness to struggle in their pursuits, associated feelings of anxiety, and their focus and awareness of their accomplishments.

The application of these two theories will inform me of how learning takes place in an embedded, on-the-job learning environment and how impactful that learning is through a reflective lens. Persistence in difficult situations is illustrated through psychosocial support (Mertz, 2004) provided in the mentoring process. Consequently, I am interested in exploring how the learning and shifting of beliefs and perspective will influence an aspiring school leaders’ beliefs in their abilities to lead in a complex school environment.
Situated Knowledge and Related Assumptions

I am a deeply committed school leader in the K-12 public school system in South Carolina in my 18th year of service. My experience is focused on engaging students and families in poverty with diverse learning needs, which is currently represented in my school population of 700 students (47.4% white, 29.5% Black/African-American, 14.5% Hispanic/Latino, 1.0% Asian American, and 6.6% Multiracial). Of these 700 adolescent learners, 74% are identified as economically disadvantaged, with 18% of our total learners being served in Special Education programs. Of the total population, 33% of students are served in a Gifted and Talented learning environment. It is my belief that diverse learning environments require leaders who are equipped with skills to meet the academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs of their students and that this is developed through the building of relational capacities between leaders.

Additionally, I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have had a former supervisor take a chance on me very early in my career through the extension of a part time administrative role that jump-started my school leadership journey. Under his service as Principal, I had the opportunity to develop a “toolbox” of school leadership skills. Most importantly, his mentoring was instrumental in shaping my philosophy and beliefs of how to best educate adolescent learners in a rigorous and supportive learning environment.

Given the autobiographical influence of this study, there are ontological and epistemological assumptions that were addressed in the methodology to include the relational capacity between a principal and assistant principal, the desire of the assistant principal to pursue a principalship, district and state programming opportunities for
aspiring school leaders, readiness to mentor and receive mentoring through adult learning theories, gender assumptions, and the lack of mentorship being a secondary reason for turnover behind community demographics and socioeconomics.

**Overview of the Methodology**

The study investigates the attributes of in-service principals who demonstrate readiness to mentor their assistant principals who aspire to be principals. Data was collected from five principals and five assistant principals over the course of two semi-structured interviews per participant. In total, twenty interviews were conducted. Background information on each participant was collected (e.g., total years of experience, years of experience as a teacher, years of experience as a school level leader, levels of experience in elementary, middle and high school, quantity of assistant principals under their supervision or supervising principals, participant gender and race, etc.) in conjunction with the interview data and compared to any potential themes (e.g., more years of experience yields more readiness, etc.) that may emerge in the coding of the interview data. Data collected from the study were coded for emerging themes of mentoring attributes and readiness for the mentoring process. A document analysis of leadership mentoring programs for the principal’s school districts, as well as mentoring curriculum or documents from the South Carolina Department of Education were analyzed to gather data on state level mentoring opportunities. Table 1.1 summarizes the data collection utilized for the study.

Middle school principals and assistant principals in South Carolina will be utilized as participants in the study to capture inservice school leaders who most likely have broad experiences and certification in elementary, middle and high school. These
leaders are currently serving in School to Watch schools and are designated as high performing schools by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. The intensity sample (Patton, 2002) contains five principals and five assistant principals serving as school leaders in high performing middle schools.

Table 1.3

Data Collection Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1. What type of attributes are evident in principals who demonstrate readiness for mentoring aspiring principals?</td>
<td>Initial Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subquestion 1. What attributes are identified as common strengths and areas of growth for principals to demonstrate readiness for mentoring?</td>
<td>Interviews with Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with Assistant Principals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Field Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District Mentoring Document Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State Mentoring Document Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 2. How do self perceptions of principal readiness for mentoring compare to the perceptions of their mentee assistant principals?</td>
<td>Interviews with Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with Assistant Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Field Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Operational Definition of Terms

1. *Aspiring Principal.* The following definition of aspiring as “directing one’s hopes or ambitions toward becoming a specified type of person.” In this study, aspiring principals are defined as a current school leader (assistant principal) who is in preparation for the role of principal.

2. *Mentoring partnership.* “A relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protege for the purpose of helping and developing the protege’s career” (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Kram, 2007). For the purpose of this study the protege was referred to as the mentee or aspiring principal.
3. **Readiness.** An online search in the Oxford Dictionary yielded the following definition of readiness as “the state of being fully prepared for something.” For the purpose of this study readiness refers to the principal's self-efficacy of mentoring, which will influence the readiness of the assistant principal to assume the role of principal.

4. **School Leader.** School leader is defined as a principal, assistant principal, or other individuals who are an employee or officer of an elementary or secondary school, responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the elementary or secondary school building (Public Law No. 114-95, Every Student Succeeds Act, Title VIII, 2015). For the purpose of this study the school leaders are 10 principals and 1 corresponding assistant principal for each principal for a total of 20 school leaders.

5. **Self-efficacy.** Bandura (1989b) defined self-efficacy as “people’s beliefs in their capabilities to fulfill different levels of task demands.” The literature also states that a person’s beliefs in their capabilities will strongly influence their readiness for a task (Fasko & Fasko, 1998).

**Conclusion**

The introduction to the study provides a brief overview of the need for effective school leaders and how mentoring can be an integral part of the development and sustainability of school leaders. The research statement, purpose, and rationale, and significance of the study were presented. The theoretical frameworks of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (1978a; 1978b; 1985) and Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1986) are synthesized. The researcher's subjectivity is addressed in the situated
knowledge and related assumptions. In the overview of the methodology, the research questions and data collection methods are outlined, and the chapter concludes with the study’s operational definition of terms.
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Despite the complexities and challenges faced by principals on a daily basis, the literature posits that mentoring can be impactful to the individual mentee, as well as the potential benefits to the system in which they serve (Gross, 2009). While providing an aspiring of novice principal a mentor should be a task performed with ease, the literature presents challenges with the definition of mentoring (Mertz, 2004; McKimm et al., 2003, 2007), myriad types of mentoring, differentiation of the involvement and intent (Mertz, 2004), barriers to the cultivation and sustainability of a mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985; Williams et al., 2001), and the expansiveness of the key competencies and attributes of mentors (Wallace Foundation, 2019).

In Chapter 2, I discuss the conceptual framework of mentoring as defined by Mertz (2004), the types of mentoring that are adaptable to the context of the school and community and mentee’s needs, how a mentoring relationship evolves in stages, and barriers to a successful mentoring partnership. Extended discussion is provided on how transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) is foundational to the concept of mentoring as a leader seeks to maximize the self-efficacy of their mentee (Bandura, 1977, 1997) which is their ability to lead in and of themselves. Additionally, mentoring in the context of school leadership is explored through the research of principal induction and mentoring.
as a bidirectional process (Gross, 2009) that focuses on skills and attributes (Walker & Dimmock, 2006) of transformational leaders who seek to positively influence and mentor aspiring and novice principals, as well as those who lead and develop a culture of excellence.

**Defining Mentoring**

Professional mentoring takes place in a variety of shapes and sizes to suit the individual and contextual needs of the mentor and mentee. Mentoring is a “very old concept in a new guise,” according to McKimm et al. (2003, 2007). Dating back to the ancient Greeks, the concept mentoring was born out of the story of Odysseus entrusting his son, Telemachus, to a guardian Mentor in light of his extended absence to fight the Trojan Wars. Despite Odysseus trusting his son’s rearing to someone who would eventually leave him with ill-developed leadership skills, the disguised goddess Athena stepped in. By doing so, she assumed counseling and guidance over Telemachus inspiring his claim and authority (adapted from Homer, 1990).

Mertz (2004) discussed the lack of clarity in the research and the distinguishing characteristics of mentorship versus a generic, helpful relationship. She utilized a quote from Healy (1997) to summarize the inconsistencies amongst researchers:

“The seeds of empirical study have been cast too broadly to yield a harvest of cumulative knowledge given the inconsistent, idiosyncratic definitions of mentoring...employed… The absence of definitional consensus is stymieing efforts to synthesize empirical findings into a coherent body of knowledge and to identify important unanswered questions” (Healy, 1997, p. 9 - 10).
While mentoring is difficult to define amongst scholars, two definitions merit discussion in the literature: 1) The help of another person or group of people (Huizing, 2012; Limbert, 1995) that supports the mentee in the “significant transition of knowledge, work, and thinking” (Meggison & Clutterbuck, 1995) and 2) The assistance in helping someone become who and what they aspire to become (McKimm et al., 2003, 2007).

The literature focuses on six primary types of mentoring (Table 1) that are established or evolve through either formal or information relationships. Formal mentoring is designed at the discretion of the organization. The design is commonly composed of mentors and mentees paired together to accomplish career growth objectives, retain employees, and diversify organizational perspectives (Eddy et al, 2007). Additionally, it is typical for formal mentoring relationships to have a structured approach to expectations and outcomes through orientations (Eby et al, 2004a; Eddy et al, 2007) and a defined timeline where the mentor and mentee will have fulfilled agreed objectives (Kram, 1985; Ragins et al., 2000). Informal mentoring relationships develop as a result of a mutual “chemistry spark,” where the mentee receives early career guidance, support, and encouragement (Kram, 1985). Informal mentoring is not necessarily designed or managed by an organization; however, it focuses on the long-term career achievement goals of the mentee for an extended period of time (Kram, 1985). An informal relationship is known to achieve a more positive rapport between the mentor and mentee in a more efficient manner (Eby & McManus, 2004b).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Mentoring</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Key Advantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual mentoring can be described as informal or formal mentoring and as a traditional one-to-one format building a relationship to support career trajectory and psychosocial well-being (Kram, 1985; Allen &amp; O’Brien, 2006).</td>
<td>More widely accepted as a traditional form of mentoring, individual mentoring is designed to last a few years but can continue as a lasting partnership (Maeglin, 2003; Doody, 2003; Myers, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Group mentoring polyads may be represented within 3 frameworks: peer group mentoring (PGM), one-to-many mentoring (OTMM), and many-to-one mentoring (MTOM) (Bozeman &amp; Feeney, 2007)</td>
<td>Limbert (1995) identified 10 advantages to a group mentoring model: “flexibility, inclusivity, shared knowledge, interdependence, broader vision of the organization, widened external network, provided a safe place, developed team spirit and skills, personal growth, and friendships” (Huizing, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Mentoring is provided to the entirety of a team with a focus on teamwork, collaboration, and outcomes of the group as a whole. Feedback is given based on the outcomes of the entirety of the team based on its objectives (Kozlowski et al., 1996)</td>
<td>Over time, team based mentoring has gained momentum as a means to increase the effectiveness of an organization with a focus on building collaboration through shared feedback, analysis of data, and collective problem solving (Williams et al., 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>The formation of a relationship where the mentor and mentee are of a similar level of experience and are paired together either formally or informally to fulfill a need (Terrien et al., 2007).</td>
<td>Participants are able to share in mutual benefits to include altruism, cognitive, personal, and social growth (Beltman &amp; Schaeben, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual</td>
<td>Similar in nature to face to face mentoring, virtual mentoring is defined as two professionals working together in different geographic locations in an electronic format (Owens, 2014).</td>
<td>The intent of virtual mentoring is to provide a more cost effective, convenient means to meet the professional needs of an individual. Owen (2015) also delineates that virtual mentoring is not a “poor cousin” to face to face mentoring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>The formation of a mentoring relationship where knowledge is not a “one way street” (Greengard, 2002) where senior level professionals are paired with junior level professionals who are acting as the mentor to their senior colleague (Murphy, 2012).</td>
<td>Reverse mentoring is an innovative means to bridge generational gaps mutually beneficial to both participants. For example, the senior level mentee is exposed to more innovative technology, while the junior level mentor is able to gain a more sophisticated perspective on a practice or organization (Murphy, 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the purpose of this study, individual mentoring (Kram, 1985) was the primary focus on the design of school leadership partnerships. It is reasonable to hypothesize that elements of reverse mentoring (Greengard, 2002; Murphy, 2012) will emerge as themes.

The Wallace Foundation in collaboration with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2019) explains the key elements of experiential learning by differentiating between leadership mentoring and coaching.

**Table 2.2**

*Differentiation of the Roles of Mentoring and Coaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring</th>
<th>Coaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal relationship between peers</td>
<td>Formal relationship between a client and individual trained to coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstructured and driven by the needs of the mentee</td>
<td>Built around a standards-based structure of accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers for whom the role is an additional responsibility</td>
<td>Dedicated to and compensated for the role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation of nurture and support</td>
<td>Authentic support through feedback that steps outside of a comfort zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typically senior ranking to their mentee</td>
<td>Qualifications are not linked to seniority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for multiple mentors to fulfill support needs</td>
<td>Meets more long term needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Bloom, 2005)

In this analysis, the Wallace Foundation not only differentiates between mentoring and coaching, they follow up the necessary support for aspiring principals through a specific coaching model that provides specific, targeted leadership support (Wilson, 2019). Mentoring was described as an emotional outlet through the provision of a listening ear, a source of advice, and a seasoned veteran who understands the navigation of district procedures and politics. Coaching accounts for more intensive, focused
preparation for specific action items, such as teacher recruitment, the supervision and evaluation of teachers, fiscal planning, and instructional programming (Wilson & Bloom, 2019). While many districts approach principal support from the mentoring lens, Wilson and Bloom (2019) stated, “districts that invest in principal coaching—specifically at the early career stage—equip their building leaders with the skill sets necessary to command confidence, trust, and—ultimately—success.” For the purpose of principal improvement, mentors are expected to engage in both descriptors outlined by The Wallace Foundation (2019); however, funding and staff allocations prevent the robust elements of coaching being fully implemented in districts and states (ESSA, Title II, 2015).

The American Psychological Association (2006) Presidential Task Force focused on the sustainability created through mentoring in the field of psychology. In their research, 4 stages of mentoring were detailed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage One</th>
<th>Initiation Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal mentoring partnerships are formed through networking and interests; whereas, formal mentoring partnerships are designed through existing organizational structures. Formal partnerships are identified based on the areas of expertise of the mentor and the leveraging of these strengths based on the needs of the mentee. Evaluation of the matching of the mentor and mentee is necessary for the initiation of the partnership.</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stage Two</th>
<th>Cultivation Stage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considered the primary learning stage in the mentoring process, the mentee is actively engaged in the learning with the mentor. Two broad functions emerge during this stage: 1. Career development and 2. Psychosocial support. The mentor is supporting the mentee on how to work “effectively and efficiently” and to “survive and thrive.” Knowledge and expertise are typically shared by the mentor; however, reverse mentoring may take place with the mentee supporting innovation in the mentor.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Stage Three
Separation Stage

Generally described as the most stressful stage of mentoring, separation of the mentor and mentee could take place for various reasons: 1. End of a defined period of time for mentoring, 2. Learning objectives have been met, 3. Termination of the relationship by the mentor or mentee, or 4. The mentee seeks independent identity.

### Stage Four
Redefinition Stage

When both the mentor and mentee recognize the professional value of their relationship, the partnership evolves into a collegial relationship or social friendship. The focus of the partnership is no longer on the developmental needs of the mentee, and reverse mentoring can and often takes place during this stage.

Figure 2.1

*Stages of Mentoring*

Mentoring is a partnership built on relational capacity (Gray et al, 2007) with both participants holding each other accountable for their attitude and availability (Francis, 2020). Checkpoints for accountability within a mentoring partnership include one’s ability to lead and manage “up, down, and sideways” and possess the ability to give and receive feedback (Francis, 2020). A reverse mentoring concept has also seen success in industries, where a junior level employee mentors a more senior level employee. In doing so, a senior level employee gains insight into innovative ideas from an “up and coming” employee, as well as opportunities for critical reflection (Browning, 2017).
Conceptual Framework of Mentoring

“Because behavior change is slow and relies on opportunities for practice and reinforcement, leadership preparation, professional development, and mentoring are mechanisms for facilitating movement along the leadership continuum” (Schulze & Boscardin, 2018, p. 24). In the influence of behaviors, mentors are able to invite proteges into their practice. Through an invitational approach mentees are able to not only observe but to be reflective in their current practice and practice over time (Rogoff et al., 2003). The ongoing dialog of mentoring, referred to as narration, and as the mentor and mentee engage in dialog, they are “contributing to the development of others in a community of practice” (Brown & Duigid, 1991).

Mertz’s (2004) conceptual framework of mentoring provides a continuum of supportive, working relationships. Her model provides a substantive visual of the mentoring functions (e.g., Psychosocial Development, Professional Development, and Career Advancement) in a pyramid to denote the increasing intensity as the mentoring partnership becomes more defined, as well as roles traditionally associated with the various functions of mentoring (Mertz, 2004). The model advances the idea of mentoring from simply being an informal, supportive relationship that supports the mentee. Similar to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943, 1954) the basic needs of psychosocial development are often foundational to the success of the partnership and self-transcendence as a means for advancement (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Moreover, the pyramid seeks to incorporate the myriad of relationships within a professional context that all have value in the development of the mentee.
Effective role modeling, or psychosocial development (Mertz, 2004) provides reciprocal professional benefits for the mentor and mentee as they engage in synergistic co-mentoring (Deptula & Williams, 2017), which allows for a shared responsibility in goal setting and aids in the mentee’s development of their leadership identity (Weinberg, 2019). Four domains guide mutuality in mentoring relationships that position both parties to be benefactors in the mentoring process (Ragin & Verbos, 2007):

1. **Mutual benefits** are described as the social process where the mentee and mentor engage in cultivation of the relationship where they are able to move beyond the basic exchange of ideas. In this domain, the mentee is able to authentically develop their identity through mutual understanding.
2. Defined as co-created relationships, influence is achieved through a mentee’s sophisticated identity of self and the mentor’s ability to design personalized learning experiences for the mentee based on their individual needs and goals.

3. Expectations are communicated through open dialogue. A mentee’s willingness to desire and accept feedback are the initial steps in creating a fundamentally productive partnership and the mentee’s salient progress in their career development.

4. In order to expose the mentee to rigorous, meaningful learning experiences, understanding is necessary for the mentor to have intimate knowledge of the mentee’s professional identity and developmental needs. Also described as “belongingness,” this domain allows the mentee’s authentic needs to emerge, in order for the authenticity of the partnership to take place.

Much has been written regarding the career satisfaction and psychosocial support provided through mentoring, and the reciprocal benefits of mentoring were highlighted in Bozionelos' study where he found a significant relationship between a mentor’s perception of their career success and the level of mentoring provided (2004).

**Professional development.** Mentoring is a partnership built on relational capacity (Gray et al, 2007) with both participants holding each other accountable for their attitude and availability (Francis, 2020). Checkpoints for accountability within a mentoring partnership include one’s ability to lead and manage “up, down, and sideways” and possess the ability to give and receive feedback (Francis, 2020). A reverse mentoring concept has also seen success in industries, where a junior level employee mentors a more senior level employee. In doing so, a senior level employee gains insight into
innovative ideas from an “up and coming” employee, as well as opportunities for critical reflection (Browning, 2017).

**Career development.** The literature highlights the intersectionality between leadership and mentoring where both mentoring functions of career development and psychosocial support are achieved (Williams et al., 2009) “Highly developed supervisor–subordinate relationships may evolve into mentoring relationships where both parties share a similar view of their careers” (Graen et al., 1987). Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) defines the quality of a supervisory relationship and when combined with mentoring yields commitment and satisfaction (Williams et al., 2009, Liden et al., 1993). Supervisory career mentoring captures intentional focus on the mentoring functions and yields more significant gains than those of LMX, thus being a more accurate predictor of career success and a long-term commitment to the success of the mentee (Williams et al., 2009). In her conceptual model, Mertz (2004) defines career development as the highest level of mentorship, where mentors are leveraging other professional partnerships within their networks to support their mentee. Also defined as “brokering,” career development and advancement encompasses mentorship as a means to “get ahead” and to strategically align their mentoring goals to be futuristic and forward moving (Mertz, 2004).

**Barriers of Mentoring**

The Wallace Foundation (2013) supports the development and sustainment achieved through principal mentoring; however, they outline limitations such as vague, ambiguous goals, an imbalance in support of managerial tasks versus instructional leadership tasks, insufficient professional development and training for mentors, inadequate time and duration for mentoring and follow up, and lack of data to assess the
effectiveness of mentoring. A key contributor to these shortcomings is an insufficient investment of fiscal resources to support mentoring (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

**Marginal and Dysfunctional mentoring.** A significant portion of mentoring can be categorized as marginal according to Ragins and Scandura (1997), and they define marginal as “barely exceeding the minimum requirements.” Dysfunctional mentoring is a more severe, destructive partnership where neither the mentor or mentee gain from the relationship (Williams et al, 2001) with the potential for the partnership to be outright destructive (Kram, 1985). Four primary dysfunctional mentoring behaviors are outlined in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3**

*Primary dysfunctional mentoring behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative relations</td>
<td>Aggression, bullying, abuse of power, and intimidation; mentors being overprotective with selfish, ulterior motives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship difficulty stemming from good intent</td>
<td>Periodic encounters with personality conflicts, differences in work ethic, reciprocal overdependence, disagreements, and inability to resolve conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoiling</td>
<td>A positive, satisfying relationship that is strained by an episode of poor judgment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submissiveness</td>
<td>Reflected in an imbalance of power, overdependence on the part of the mentee. Occurrence of cloning of a singular style of leadership or district directed curriculum as opposed to needs-based mentorship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Williams et al., 2009; McClary, 2019; Crow & Matthews, 1998)

Additionally, research has detailed a “too much of a good thing” paradox in mentoring relationships that may result in a skewed perception of a mentee’s positive experiences with mentoring even though the experiences may fail to meet their needs (Ehrhardt & Ragins, 2018; Weinberg, 2019). For example, mentees may not receive a
needed level of authenticity from prototype mentoring that is strategically designed to meet their needs despite their positive perception or opinion of their mentor (Ibarra, 1999). Emulation of a mentor allows the mentee to gain better insight into role specifications, Erde (1997) argues that mentees with a high degree of self awareness are able to understand a role while developing their identity as a leader.

Ibarra (1999) goes on to describe an “a la carte” selection analogy of the mentor intentionally designing modeling experiences and the mentee intentionally receiving and adapting emulation. Gibson (2004) noted that a mentor being in a supervisory role or position of authority may not be advantageous to the mentee utilizing role modeling in their mentoring experiences to authenticate a true identity as a leader or their “possible self” with developmental goals (Humberd & Rouse, 2016).

**Gender barriers.** Ragins and Cotton discovered numerous impacts on gender composition in their study conducted in 1999. With career development being a primary function of mentoring, Ragins and Cotton discovered that gender does not play a role in this overall function; however, there is a significant relationship in having a male mentor with regards to compensation (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Dreher & Cox, 1996). This conclusion further supports the findings of Ragins’ studies conducted in 1989 and 1997 that suggest that women have the tendency to gain more power and influence in an organization when they are mentored by men as opposed to being mentored by women. Diversifying gender composition of mentoring partnerships has also been studied and concludes that female mentees with male mentors are typically more satisfied with the benefits of mentoring (e.g., exposure, challenging assignments, and compensation) than that of men with women mentors (Ragins & Scandura, 1997). Additionally, the research
supports that male principals who choose female mentors typically have higher self esteem as they approach the mentoring relationship and identify specific needs for support (Infante, 1990), although women typically do not hold as much power or influence in an organization (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Despite the research indicating that gender has little impact on mentoring outcomes, Ragins and Cotton’s study indicated that the outcomes of functions of mentoring can be differentiated in the literature (1999). With typical career development being supported by the fact that male mentors provide more significant compensation and career trajectory, the opposite is true for the psychosocial development of their mentees (Ragins, 1997; Scandura & Viator., 1994). Female mentors have the tendency to support psychosocial needs of their mentees as they are typically relationship oriented and ascribe to the gender characteristics of women being more nurturing and trusting (Okurame, 2007; Ragins, 1997; Fairhurst, 1993).

**Race barriers.** As organizations become increasingly more diverse, the exploration of intersectionality between race and mentoring is a critical element of workplace advancement (Blake-Bell et al, 2006). Blake-Bell et al. (2006) explored the literature to answer questions on how race influences three factors: 1. Access to mentoring, 2. Interactions in mentoring, and 3. Outcomes of mentoring. The interactions between diverse backgrounds presents challenges for organizations, since mentoring is typically defined as a senior level mentor influencing a junior level employee (Kram, 1988). While the study is dated, Catalysts (1999; 2000) conducted research on women of color having limited access to mentoring primarily due to the majority of their mentors being white males. To a degree, this barrier of access for
women of color impacted their outcomes. For women and men of color, gaining access to mentors of the same race presents a challenge due to the lack of representation of diverse racial backgrounds in senior level employees within an organization.

The complexities of interracial interactions in the workplace also spills over into mentoring processes (Blake-Bell et al., 2006). Thirty-two years ago, Thomas (1989) stated that the changing demographics of the workplace, in terms of race, “engenders the deeper difficulties we face in creating a climate of authentic collaboration” between white people and people of color. Through the use of Kram’s (1988) model of mentoring, Thomas (1989) hypothesized that trust was the primary factor in same-race mentoring relationships, which proved more successful in psychosocial support.

Race as a predictor of mentoring outcomes remains poorly studied or defined in the literature, primarily because it is students from the white perspective (Eby & Allen, 2002). For example, Eby and her colleagues (2002) have studied dysfunctional mentoring relationships, but their sample sizes have been 95-97% white. Viewed as “unfinished business,” researchers continue to explore the outcomes of mentoring with race as the key variable being measured (Blake-Bell et al., 2006).

**Time commitment.** Bloom (2005) discussed a limitation of mentoring, in that it is an additional responsibility of a supervisor or peer that can be perceived as a responsibility that is lower in priority for the mentor. As a result of this, an obstacle is presented in the form of time commitment to devote to the mentoring process. The United States Office of Personnel Management (USOPM, 2008) researched mentoring for federal employees and described the barrier of time commitment as little to no time dedicated to interacting or thinking critically, low interest or buy-in from the mentor or
mentee, diminishing engagement throughout the duration of the partnership, and little to no evidence of monitoring professional growth through the process. These negative experiences are explained by a lack of roadmapping, which provides planning and structure to the selection and process of mentoring. In light of this, flash mentoring is a recommendation of the USOPM (2008) in collaboration with the National Academy of Public Administration which occurs with mentoring taking place in short bursts with multiple mentors. In the pilot research conducted by these agencies, it was discovered that flash mentoring was beneficial as it was reasonable in time commitment, provided the mentee with multiple experts in which to support a mentee either short or long term, and a more broad selection process through access to multiple mentors.

**Transformational Leadership as an Underpinning to Mentoring**

In his book *A Season of a Man’s Life*, Daniel Levinson describes mentoring as an act of giving and receiving, and goes on to assert that mentoring is less about the formal roles rather the character of the relationship (1978). For the purpose of defining transformational leadership, Burns's (1978) characterization of transformational leadership takes place when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality’ (p. 19). As outlined in the literature, transformational leadership influences the empowering of a mentee to lead (Johnson, 2007b & 2014a), the development of self-efficacy (Northouse, 2004; Bass & Aviolo, 1993), the process of change within the organization (Herrera, 2001; McKnight, 2013), and the development of the leader’s identity (Komives et al., 2009).
From the outset of mentoring, relationships between the mentor and mentee are typically transactional in oversight and evaluation (Johnson, 2007b); however, the tendency for the mentee to outgrow the rigidity of the transactional approach is significant (Johnson, 2014a). The Mentoring Relationship Continuum (MRC) captures the definition of the role of mentoring as more of the capacity of the relationship and functions of mentoring rather than a specific role or assignment (Johnson, 2014b). Ideally, the mentoring relationship will shift to the right on the continuum away from transactional towards a transformational approach that incorporates empowering the mentee, developing self-efficacy and self-confidence, and encouraging mentees and followers in a healthy culture of positivity and innovation (Bass, 1998, Johnson et al., 2014b).

Transformational leadership is best described as building the leadership capacity internally, thus inspiring, individualizing, and idealizing one’s sense of self-leadership (Bass, 1985). Developed in the era of Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, the father of the theory of transformational leadership James McGregor (1978) seeks to define this style as one that guides change management and strategic planning as an organization seeks to rebrand their image. Transformational leadership, a close cousin to servant leadership, seeks to build trust, establishes ethics and integrity, promotes a clear sense of belonging within the organization, stimulates the intellectual capacity of the individuals within the group, gains commitment from the members, and provides coaching and mentorship for members to become leaders in and of themselves (Northhouse, 2004).
Kalkan et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study in a Turkish school system of almost 18 million students, 1 million teachers, and 81,000 school principals. Though not as vast as the public school system of the United States, the key issues of lack of principal preparation or professional development in enhancing school culture and influence student growth transcend these varying geographic areas. The survey methodology used intends to measure the organizational perception of teachers on the school’s culture that is influenced by the principal’s leadership style. Kalkan et al. (2020) measured the relationship between three types of leadership - transformational, transactional, and laissez faire and the organizational image or culture through the lens of teachers. The Leadership Style Scale of School Principals (LSSSP) and the School Culture Scale (SCS) were administered to teachers, which measures their perception of the leadership. The results of this study indicate that a significant relationship exists between transformational leadership and positive school culture, no significant relationship between transactional leadership and school culture, and a negative relationship between laissez faire leadership and school culture.

To achieve the maximum potential of their peers and followers, transformational leaders engage in one or more of the components of transformational leadership identified in Table 2.4.

### Table 2.4

*Components of Transformational Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Transformational leaders are able to...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idealized Influence (II)</td>
<td>Engage in role modeling for their followers and elicit trust, respect and admiration. Additionally, the leader extends reassurance to their followers in the overcoming of obstacles, while taking intentional risks. Leaders also demonstrate high moral character in their practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational Motivation (IM)</td>
<td>Inspire teamwork and collegiality towards a clearly communicated vision and expectations. Bass and Aviolo (1993) compare IM to charismatic leadership.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation (IS)</td>
<td>Stimulate their followers' innovation, creativity, and ability to solve problems. The leader involves multiple perspectives in approaching solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Consideration (IC)</td>
<td>Create a supportive climate where the individual needs of the followers are met through coaching and mentoring. Shared decision-making and visibility are key to developing followers. (Bass &amp; Riggio, 2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The significance of the relationship between the mentor and mentee can be characterized as transformational leadership. This relationship allows the mentee to develop skills and attributes not only for leadership but to also bring about change in an organization or environment (Northhouse, 2004). Supervisory Career Mentoring (SCM) or transformational leadership epitomizes the supervisors commitment to the professional and social growth of their mentee, thus investing in the overall culture of the organization (Ragins & Scandura, 1997). Consequently, an emotional attachment can be assumed in transformational leadership between the follower and the leader - a foundational element of a positive mentoring relationship (Godshalk & Sosik, 2000).

Transformational leadership also supports change agency. Changes in policy, systems, resources, and innovation can be expected when an aspiring leader assumes the role as principal, but the question remains if the person behind the role has the skill set to deploy in the face of change. A leader can also assume that change equates some sort of transformation. In order for successful change to occur, transformational leaders manage tasks but also move followers in the direction of change through the development of trust (Herrera, 2001; McKnight, 2013). A review of the literature from Hall and Hord (2015) resulted in a framework for an effective change process that includes six factors: “(1)
developing a shared vision, (2) planning and providing resources, (3) investing in professional learning, (4) checking on progress, (5) providing continuous assistance and (6) creating a culture supportive of change.” The research of Leithwood et al. (2013) claimed the importance of principal professional development, this continues to be a missing link in the process of developing and mentoring principals to be change agents. For this reason, mentoring has been identified as a measure of transformational leadership (Kouzes et al., 2007).

Bass and Aviolo (1993) advocate for transformational leaders building the self-confidence of their followers or mentees through the communication of a vision and emphasis on goal attainment. Self-efficacy was studied as a mediating factor in the development of transformational leadership in a study conducted in the Czech Republic in a non-educational setting (Prochazka et al., 2017). While there was a weak relationship between an employee’s self-efficacy and the transformational leadership qualities of their supervisors, there was a strong relationship between employee engagement and transformational leadership, with self-efficacy explaining a small portion of the employee’s engagement. The results claimed that transformational leadership strongly influenced engagement, which had a large effect on self-efficacy of the individual and organization through increased opportunities for mastership experience, vicarious experience and social persuasion (Bandura, 1995) (Prochazka et al., 2017). As such, it is plausible that the more an employee is engaged, the more likely they are to pursue more challenging goals, thus gaining mastery of skillfulness in an area (Bandura, 1995).

Purposeful, process-driven, and ethical are adjectives used to describe the Leadership Identity Development theory explored by Komives et al. (2009). In this
study, participants self-identified as leaders were closely examined to determine their level of comfort and confidence in attitudes towards leadership and how these changed over time. Although participants in this research were undergraduate students focusing on leadership development, there is relevance to school leadership preparation in the emergent grounded theory used to frame the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Five key strategies were identified to diagram the phases of identity development for the undergraduate students to include: 1. Awareness, 2. Exploration/Engagement, 3. Leader Identified, 4. Leadership Differentiated, 5. Generativity, and 6. Integration/Synthesis (Komives et al, 2009). For the purpose of integrating this theory and the findings to the leadership development of aspiring principals, emphasis was placed on Stage 5 - Generativity and Stage 6 - Integration/Synthesis in this particular study. Komives (2009) defines generativity as a commitment to developing leadership in others around a shared purpose that a person seeks to influence. As an extension of this influence, integration and synthesis of leadership development is acknowledging the personal capacity for leadership in diverse contexts. This stage represents a pinnacle of self efficacy (Bandura, 1977) where the leader is able to exhibit a level of motivation to lead in and of themselves, a foundational piece of influencing leadership development in aspiring principals.

Understanding the leadership development process is critical for local and state education agencies and outcomes from leadership that is focused on change. Exploring how leadership identity shifts over time under the influence of a transformational leader and mentorship can be explained by the increased followership (Bandura, 1977) and perception of the leader as a role model (Daresh, 2004, Scandura et al., 2004). Discovery
of engagement as a mediating factor in the development of self efficacy is foundational to understanding the impact of transformational leadership and leaders advancing under this theory (Prochazka et al, 2017).

**Mentoring Aspiring and Novice Principals**

“Good programs clearly place mentoring into the larger program of leadership induction. Care must be taken, however, to expand the traditional meaning of the word *induction* into a more flexible, bidirectional process” (Gross, 2009, p. 519). Armed with this information on strategies that are grounded in evidence-based research, states are moving forward with designing leadership development opportunities that exist in pre-service, inservice, or a hybrid of these two models, in order to support school leaders in their states. In most states, ESSA plans have been developed to focus on five critical areas of leadership: (1) prioritizing excellent instructional leadership, (2) promoting diverse, equity-focused leadership, (3) distributing leadership and building the principal pipeline, (4) strengthening and innovating pre-service training and development, and (5) focusing on the design of on-the-job principal support (CCCSO, 2016). Instructional leadership is at the core of principal’s dynamic role in the understanding that “great principals hire great teachers, and teachers say a good principal is their number one reason for staying in a school” (Minnich, 2000), as well as collective teacher efficacy yielding significant results in student achievement and teacher retention (Hattie, 2015). A socially equitable and academically excellent school begins with strong leadership, in order to provide all students with the opportunities and needs-based support to close the achievement gap for students in high poverty, high minority schools and communities (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010).
Redesigning principal preparation in institutions of higher education continues to evolve as innovative practices to recruit high quality candidates for school leadership roles, embed relevant and authentic internship experiences that are grounded in theory and practice (New Leaders, 2013; Keleman & Fenton, 2015). Through the improvement of the principal pipeline and the design of on-the-job principal supports, states are approaching their plans from preservice and inservice models that share commonalities in being grounded in theory, practice, and reflection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). While the focus remains on on-the-job support, Gross (2009) encourages districts to focus on collaboration to develop long-term collaboration.

Much like mentoring novice teachers, the principal mentor is not a singular resource designed to provide the primary learning experiences for the developing teacher. A novice teacher constructs meaning from their educator preparation in higher education, life experiences, professional readings, and collaborative experiences with other professionals, and the role of the mentor is to provide support to the teacher in putting their knowledge into practice (Portner, 2008). Gray et al. (2007) outline numerous pitfalls of mentoring and provide examples of how it is often not embedded in the school leadership internship experience as a robust opportunity to gain on the job experience with accompanying reflective practices. The “professional seal of approval” is negatively portrayed in this study as school leadership interns are learning under practitioners who lack time, experience, or capacity to be able to impact the next generation of school leaders.

Aspiring school administrators, potentially responsible for the quality of learning achieved by countless numbers of students, must be tested against
Prepared school leaders to transition into the role of principal requires concerted efforts on the part of higher education and local school districts. In this meta-analysis, Browne-Ferrigno and colleagues (2004) conclude that the clinical preparation of school leaders takes place in both preservice and inservice phases of leadership development. They concluded that three important outcomes are achieved through leadership mentoring in clinical practice: 1. The simulation of role socialization for the aspiring principal, 2. Opportunities for professional development for the veteran mentor principal, and 3. A reciprocal increase in leadership capacity on the part of the mentor principal and the aspiring principal (Browne-Ferrigno, 2001, 2003).

In her 2020 study, Acton focused on informal mentoring and professional development and learning as a focal point for how to improve the fundamental areas of change agency under transformational leadership theory. “Talking to my colleagues is number one in what has helped me grow as an administrator. These would be my trusted colleagues, my inner circle. Each of them also has different areas of expertise that I can call individually when I need advice or support” (p. 6). In this article, Acton supported the notion that school principals working collaboratively in a collegial environment are more likely to engage in deep, critical reflection through networking and mentorship. School principals who work collaboratively in a collegial environment are more likely to engage in deep, critical reflection with their peers and mentors. In this qualitative study of five principals, the dominant themes were specific, needs based professional development...
and opportunities to interact and network with their peer principals and superintendents as mentors (2020).

Within a systematic approach to mentorship and feedback, the participant principals indicated that they would be able to “buy in” to an idea, policy, or procedure thus being able to lead in and of themselves, which is the key idea of transformational leadership. Acton (2020) summarizes the role of the principal as the “gatekeeper” for change and encourages districts to take a more active, visible role in working collaboratively with principals. The objective of the collaboration is to enact more sustainable change through networking and collaborative learning. In doing so, districts are maximizing their resources for professional development by enhancing the professional skill set of their leaders, thus establishing a solid foundation to implement change and sustain improvement in their respective school environments.

While principal preparation grounded in theory is necessary for the development of school leaders, socialization into the role of principal is defined as authentic, field-based experiences under the guidance and supervision of a mentor principal (Muth, 2002). Described as on-the-job training, aspiring principals have the opportunity to increase their self efficacy in their own leadership skills in a series of relevant, real life tasks, decisions, and experiences. Throughout a paradigm of authentic experiences, the mentoring principal has access to the aspiring principal and differing perspective on leadership. Through strategically designed mentoring opportunities, the mentor principal is supported through critical reflection and fosters innovative leadership practices (Browne-Ferrigno et al., 2001, 2003). Finally the reciprocal benefits of mentoring is discovered in this study where both participants are benefactors of a community of
practice whereby their leadership is sharpened, thus improving the outcomes for the schools under their leadership (Browne-Ferrigno et al., 2001, 2003; Hansen et al., 2002). The findings of the study concluded that experiential learning under the supervision of highly experienced and trained mentors yielded significant results in providing strategic, carefully constructed learning opportunities for aspiring principals (Browne-Ferrigno et al., 2003).

**Readiness for Mentoring**

It is well researched in education the need for quality mentoring based on authentic social interactions that allow for feedback and reflection. However, professionals, to include teachers and school leaders, are not adequately prepared to mentor aspiring teachers and school leaders (Ambrosetti, 2010). As discussed in an Australian study (Ambrosetti, 2014), when mentors are not prepared or demonstrate readiness for mentoring, they revert to the sharing of their experiences and sets of wisdom in a role that is supervisory in nature. While there is intersectionality in mentoring and supervision, mentoring is more likely to be reciprocal with mentors needing key competencies and readiness to embrace the task of mentoring (Ambrosetti, 2010).

River - A Mentor IQ Company defines readiness for mentoring through 3 A’s - Attitude, Availability, and Accountability (Francis, 2020). Being mentally and emotionally prepared to engage in mentoring is built around seven key ideas: 1. Being open to the ideas and opinions of others who differ in background, 2. Being willing to share what one knows, 3. Open to learning what someone else can teach, 4. Willing and able to have honest conversations, 5. Able to provide feedback in a productive manner,
6. Ready to listen with an open, judgment-free mind, and 7. Open to new ideas and advice. These ideas culminate into the measurement of a mentor's attitude towards mentoring. Ell et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study with 30 participants in an educational setting and concluded that one’s personal attributes and professional qualities were linked in a mentor’s ability to know their content and pedagogy while being reflective and responsive to feedback.

A mentor’s availability is paramount to the success of talent management and developing future leaders within an organization (McDonell et al, 2010). Availability according to Rivers (2020) is defined as the commitment of time, emotional capacity, and mental capacity to be responsive to the needs of the mentee. Both in person and virtual mentoring are highlighted as effective methods of managing time in a mentoring partnership, which is important to frame their attributes and skill sets as a mentor (Ell et al, 2015).

Assuming the role of mentor, requires a principal to fully embrace the daunting task of preparing school leaders to “support, assist, and guide” the mentee on their journey to self-reliance and identity (Crocker & Harris, 2002). For the mentor, it is vital to have knowledge of what content is meaningful for the mentee, how to communicate salient points and ideas, and how to assess the knowledge gained by the mentee throughout the process (Gross, 1998, 2009). In a case study conducted with first year principals, the five primary themes of mentorship used to select and assess the readiness of mentors included: 1. Empowering the mentee, 2. Assisting with the navigation of school and district politics, 3. Aligning mentoring curriculum with the context of the role, 4. Identifying and honoring the school’s culture, and 5. Providing a multitude of
perspectives to dissect a problem (Bolman & Deal, 1993). The mentor must also assume four primary objectives outlined by Bolman and Deal (1993): “1. Teach them how, 2. Let them do, 3. Help them learn from having done, and 4. Accept them unconditionally.”

Being able to balance the time commitment of mentoring as it is typically an additional responsibility of the practicing principal mentor is a consideration when selecting mentors (Gross, 2009; Wallace Foundation, 2019). Gross (2009) averages that mentors will spend approximately 165 to 652 hours mentoring (Malone, 2001) depending upon the duration of the partnership. With regards to mentoring subordinate assistant principals, the literature suggests embedding opportunities to ask critical, reflective questions such as: “Why was your response as such?, What are the potential, unintended consequences of the decision?, What were the alternatives?, “Given the opportunity again, would you respond differently?, etc.” (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991, p. 543).

**Skills and Attributes of a Mentor Principal**

Despite the research being limited on outcomes of mentoring with regards to mentoring relationships and career outcomes (Byars et al., 2015), mentoring attributes of mutual respect, reciprocity in feedback, personal connections, and similarities in ideals (Straus et al., 2013). While relational capacity of mentoring is critical to its success, the primary focus of mentoring is providing a curriculum for the mentee. Simply put, what are the expectations or objectives for learning in the process that are founded upon the principles of collaboration, which are leveraged through positive mentoring attributes (Gross, 2009; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). Walker and Dimmock (2006) describe mentoring through the lens of preparing leaders and preparing learners through the substantial involvement of highly trained principal mentors. Improving educational
leadership by preparing learners to positively impact student achievement is one of the three primary objectives of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). Supported by the Wallace Foundation, SREB approached leadership development as a learning centered process with mentoring designed to support communities. This mission is designed to ensure that every student has the opportunity to attend a school “where strong leadership results in high academic performance” (p. 5).

School leadership researcher, Robert Marzano, developed a list of 21 principal behaviors that are defined as responsibilities (2005). A metaanalysis of decades of research on effective school leadership, Marzano undertook a comparison analysis of primary responsibilities of school principals in order to improve student achievement (2005). Additional research from education and other industries support the 21 behaviors of school leaders and their correlation to improved student achievement. For the purpose of Marzano’s framework (2005), these key responsibilities were explored in terms of the competencies of the mentor and the learning objectives of the mentoring process. These behaviors are described as responsibilities and will be explored through the lens of principal readiness for mentoring, as well as indicators for assistant principal readiness to assume the roles of a principal.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>The Principal is able to...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situational Awareness</td>
<td>Address the undercurrent of the environment and any current or potential problems prior to full manifestation (Marzano, 2005), and demonstrate the ability of “getting ahead” of any potential problems. Utilize three levels of SA to include perception of the environment, comprehension of the significance of the issue, and projection of the current state may project future events (Endsley, 1988, 2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Adapt their leadership the nature and needs of a particular situation and demonstrates comfort with dissenting from their personal views in the given scenario (Marzano, 2005)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leverage their knowledge of the follower’s commitment and competence defined by the continuum approach of the situational leadership theory (Hersey &amp; Blanchard, 1972, 2007; Northhouse, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Be a storyteller of the school’s history, values, and vision. Establish themselves and the “hero or heroine” of the school that can inspire others to be more than they think they can be (Deal, 2016, p. 137-138).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understand that culture is both implicit and explicit that is centered around core values, beliefs, and feelings (Marzano, 2005).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop cohesion, purpose, and a shared vision amongst the staff and school community (Marzano, 2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Demonstrates an ability to support teachers, prioritize teaching, and limit distractions to the core responsibilities of teachers (Marzano, 2005).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Understand that the school is not an island unto itself (Cotton, 2003) but a part of a larger community ecosystem. This exists with the understanding that partnerships support the school’s vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engage with the community as a larger context of the educational environment (Marzano, 2005).</td>
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53
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monitoring and Evaluating</th>
<th>Observes practices within the school and is able to determine their effectiveness in improving student achievement (Marzano, 2005).</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge the status quo (Fullan, 2002), assume risks, protect those who are taking risks, and promote a healthy collegial discourse as a means to improve (Clarke, 2000).</td>
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<td>Order</td>
<td>Establish norms, procedures, and routines that frame the daily work of the school on its trajectory (National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 2019).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Remain focused on the mundane routines, procedures, and expectations that can have a more global impact on the environment which affects students, teachers, and parents (Marzano, 2005).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Obtain and evaluate technical and professional development resources that are designed to improve instruction (Marzano, 2005; Fullan, 2001).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engage in ongoing dialogue on the priorities of the school and plan in the context of the needs of the school (Bottoms et al., 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</td>
<td>Possesses extensive knowledge of curriculum standards, instructional best practices, and how to assess student learning (Marzano, 2005).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collaborates with other professionals to acquire innovative knowledge on how to best design instructional programming (Fullan, 2001).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>Involve all stakeholders in a shared decision-making process, where active participation takes place in working toward the mission of the organization (Marzano, 2005).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Include faculty voice in not only the development of curriculum, instruction, and assessment but also the development of school procedure and policies related to disciplinary structures (Ingersoll et al., 2018).</td>
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Change Agent

Creates a culture that promotes and sustains change (Hall & Hord, 2015) and takes part in the professional development that supports their ability to make change (Leithwood, 2013).


Focus

Establish and focus on clear, concrete goals for curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices (Marzano, 2005).

Focus attention clearly on the school’s goals and are able to convincingly engage in stakeholder review and discourse (Leithwood et al., 2003)

Contingent Reward

Use hard work and performance to gauge success and use these as an impetus for celebrating staff members (Marzano, 2005).

Treat its employees as the most important assets and knowledgeable about what motivates the employees (Lawler, 2003).

Intellectual Stimulation

Stay abreast of innovative research and theories that inform effective instructional practices (Marzano, 2005).

Link the transformational leadership theory with intellectual stimulation and intrinsic motivation as means to improve teacher performance (Bolkan et al., 2011).

Communications

Develop and maintain open, effective lines of communication that exist for the purpose of internal and external communication (Marzano, 2005).

Understands that “leadership exists only through communication” and that communication lacks satisfaction if messages lack content or consistency (Arlestig, 2007).
**Ideals/Beliefs**

Come to terms with their commitments to ensuring high quality learning for all students, and confront their own personal values of providing a safe and secure learning environment for all students (Allen et al., 2017).

Possessing, sharing, and demonstrating their beliefs about teaching and learning, which shape the conditions of the school (Marzano, 2005).

**Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

“Be a student of best practice” that possesses the knowledge about effective instructional, curricular, and assessment practices (Marzano, 2005).

Recognize four different paths on which instructional leadership flows to include: 1. A rational path rooted in the technical skills of the leader and faculty, 2. An emotional path that includes feelings, dispositions, and affective state of the school, 3. An organizational path that includes structures, processes, policies and standard operating procedures, and 4. A family path differentiates between unalterable family related variables (e.g., socioeconomic status, parent level of education, etc.) and alterable family related variables (e.g., family culture/view of education) (Leithwood et al., 2010).

**Visibility**

Maintain focus on being actively engaged in the environment to include classrooms, extracurricular activities, and the community as a whole. Classroom visits are geared towards formal and informal collection of data (Whitaker et al., 2013)

Communicate both directly and indirectly as a means to engage internal and external stakeholders (Segzin, 2016).

**Optimizer**

Lift others around them to shift their focus from lesser significant tasks to common purposes and successes they never thought possible (Burns, 1978).

Understand the various processes of motivation to include intrinsic process motivation, instrumental motivation, self-concept external motivation, self-concept internal motivation, and goal internalization motivation (Barbuto, 2005).

Inspire a self belief of accomplishing substantial success (Marzano, 2005).
Systematically celebrate the successes of students and staff, while also addressing failures (Marzano, 2005).

Affirmation

Elicit a response from students who are more likely to engage in challenging tasks and exhibit positive task performance (Liu et al., 2019)

Possess a belief that intelligence is transformational and through effort, anything can be learned (Dweck, 2006).

Relationships

Engage in interpersonal interactions that are central to ensuring a climate of trust, cohesion, cooperation, and overall job satisfaction (Price, 2011).

Garner trust and support from the followers to remove obstacles, provide emotional support, and immerse in the comradeship of the environment (Edgerson, 2006).

Maintain a level of personalization where the leader is abreast of the significant events in the lives of their teachers and staff (Marzano, 2005).

While not studied by Marzano as a key behavior, equity focused leadership is an emerging attribute that scholars find integral to the success of building leaders through job embedded supports (Leithwood et al., 2000; Honig et al., 2020). Three emerging equity focused principal behaviors are detailed by Honig, et al. as: 1. “Identify and tackle inequities at their systemic root,” 2. “Recognize and address own leadership as a part of the system perpetuating inequities,” and 3. “Take a race explicit and strengths based approach.” (2020). School leaders must interrupt patterns and cycles of inequities as they lead forward with learning opportunities for all students. To do so, a collaborative, job-embedded approach is necessary to achieve deep inquiry and address systemic inequities across the system (Honig, et al., 2020).
Hitt and Tucker (2015) conducted a metaanalysis on how school leadership practices influence student achievement that can be integrated with leadership practices. Conducted through the lens of Leithwood’s (2012) Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF), Murphy’s (2006) Learning-Centered Leadership (LCL) Framework, and Sebring et al. (2006) Essential Supports Framework (ESF), the longitudinal findings span the course of 40 years with extensive findings in 119 published studies. Hitt and Tucker (2015) developed five broad domains of effective leader practices with sub-categories that are outlined in Table 2.6

**Table 2.6**

*Effective Leader Practices (Hitt & Tucker, 2015)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Effective Leader Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing and conveying the vision</td>
<td>- Creating, articulating, and stewarding a shared vision and mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Implementing the vision by setting goals and performance expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Modeling aspirational and ethical practices;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Communicating broadly the state of the vision;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Promoting the use of data for continual improvement;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tending to external accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building professional capacity</td>
<td>- Selection of faculty and staff that are the right fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Providing individual learning opportunities and considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Building trusting relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Providing holistic opportunities to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Supporting, buffering, and recognizing individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Creating communities of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Engendering responsibility for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a supportive organization for learning</td>
<td>- Acquiring and allocating resources strategically towards the mission and vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Considering community context to maximize organizational functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Building collaborative processes for decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sharing and distributing leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tending to and building on diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Strengthening and optimizing school culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Maintaining high performance standards and expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Facilitating a high-quality learning experience - Personalizing the learning environment to reflect students’ backgrounds
- Developing and monitoring the curricular program for students
- Developing and monitoring the instructional program
- Developing and monitoring the assessment program

Connecting with external partners - Building productive relationships with families and the community
- Engaging families and the community in the collaborative process
- Anchoring schools in the community

To better understand principals’ levels of self-efficacy in their primary responsibilities and leadership practices, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) conducted a metaanalysis to determine how principals determine their confidence in their capabilities. The understanding that self-efficacy beliefs are directly linked to Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1977, 1986, and 1997) and are context and task specific for an individual. Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1986) grounds Tschannen-Moran and Gareis’ (2004) study through the understanding of the impact of self-efficacy on goal setting, effort, adaptability, persistence, and ability to take action in a given scenario.

The measurement of self-efficacy in principals has also been difficult to fully capture, with regards to measuring their beliefs in their abilities to lead and mentor the aforementioned behaviors presented that were assessed prior to Marzano’s 2005 research (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Three prior studies utilizing different measurement tools proved problematic when measuring the construct of self-efficacy. The first study conducted by Hillman (1986) failed to address the variance in complexity of tasks with the level of self-efficacy a principal may have. This study also attributed “natural ability” and “luck” to the principal’s outcome. In the second study, conducted by Imants and DeBradbander (1996), a scale was developed with predictable results that determined principal self-efficacy and failed to capture the principal’s beliefs as an individual. The
third study conducted by Dimmock and Hattie (1996) proved to be more successful and consistent with the previous principal behavior research conducted by Marzano (2005). Dimmock and Hattie (1996) utilized 16 vignettes to measure situations that principals are likely to encounter in leading schools in Australia (e.g., “school development planning; teaching learning and curriculum; managing staff; budgeting; managing parents; and managing the environment). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) adapted the vignettes to measure the self-efficacy of principals in the United States to uncover discouraging results and insufficient reliability.

**Conclusion**

The literature outlines the key advantages of mentoring to include psychosocial development where the mentor and mentee are engaged in the role modeling and are beneficiaries of a professional relationship that promotes the satisfaction of service and meeting the developmental needs of their mentees (Mertz, 2004; Deptula & Williams, 2017; Weinberg, 2019; Ragin & Verbos, 2007). Gross (2009) synthesized that quality mentors take the curriculum or expectations for learning and merge them with qualities of successful mentors to include: trusted guides, teachers, sponsors, challengers, and confidants. Successful mentors also possess attributes such as “acceptance of multiple perspectives to solve complex problems, decisiveness, the habit of asking the right questions, and mutual trust” (Gross, 2009, p. 521; Daresh, 2004; Levinson & Darrow, 1979). Additionally, professional development promotes critical reflection (Browning, 2017) for both parties, which is foundational for the process of continuous learning. Finally, career development is addressed to illustrate the potential for advancement on the
mentee as a result of learning and developing under the mentorship of a leader, with it being the most robust and beneficial form of mentoring (Mertz, 2004).

Knowing that the literature supports the design and implementation of mentoring programs to support aspiring or novice principals; however, there are current limitations with mentoring school leaders. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) in collaboration with The Wallace Foundation captured the significance of mentoring in their statement, “Until we provide the resources and structures to ensure that every mentor has the ability and support to manage challenging experiences for interns in real-school situations, the value of the mentoring process to enhance leadership preparation — and ultimately to raise student achievement — is severely limited” (Gray et al., 2007). In addition to this, “being a principal has never been easy. However, there are reasons to believe that additional help will be needed to secure the next generation of principals” (Gross, 2009, p. 516).
CHAPTER 3:  

METHODS  

Introduction to Chapter  

The retention and development of school leaders through the process of mentoring can be explored through deep reflection and analysis of emerging themes within the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe the advantages of qualitative research as deeper insight (Chalhoub-Deville & Deville, 2008) into a person’s “life, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and organizational functioning” (p. 102). The interpretivism research approach (Rahman, 2016) of qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the mentoring experiences of school leaders in their specific settings that can be generalized to other school leaders. The complexity of mentoring and school leadership experiences is more easily explored through the flexibility of qualitative inquiry (Maxwell, 2012) where participants have the opportunity and freedom to more deeply explore and reflect upon their own experiences and needs (Flick, 2011). The following research questions will guide the exploration of school leadership development:  

Research Question 1. What type of attributes are evident in principals who demonstrate readiness for mentoring aspiring principals?  

Subquestion 1. What attributes are identified as common strengths and areas of growth for principals to demonstrate readiness for mentoring?  

Research Question 2. How do self perceptions of principal readiness for mentoring compare to the perceptions of their mentee assistant principals?
Design and Methodology

Glesne (2016) and Maxwell (2013) describe the goal of qualitative methodology, which is to understand experiences, meanings, and perspectives. Because I am interested in gaining a better understanding of perspectives and lived experiences of in-service principals and their assistant principals, the research method utilized was a qualitative interview study (Creswell, 2007; Roulston, 2010). Creswell (2007) defines the objective and design of an interview study to obtain thick, rich data through the use of a qualitative investigative approach.

Research Design

This study involved the collection and analysis of data. Themes from data emerged from the comparison of similarities and differences between participant groups in the study (Creswell, 2009).

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm consists of four primary components: 1. Ontology, 2. Epistemology, 3. Methodology, and 4. Methods (Scotland, 2012). Crotty (1998) defines ontology as the study of being, or more simply put, what is. Epistemology is explained in Guba and Lincoln’s (1994, p. 108) definition of the relationship between the would-be knower, or research, and what can be known. Guba and Lincoln (1994) go on to describe the focus of epistemological assumptions on what it means to know and how knowledge is created, acquired, and communicated. Methodology is the plan by which the researcher collects and analyzes data to find out what they believe can be known (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Methods are the specific plans utilized by researchers to
discover what they believe can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and methods are the strategies or specific techniques used to gather data (Crotty, 1998).

A characteristic of an ontological assumption is how reality is seen through many views. In practice, the researcher discusses different themes as they emerge in the findings (Moustakas, 1994). The reality for each participant was constructed through the variance in experiences and expectations. For this study, I assumed that different themes would emerge in the findings as they relate to different experiences, perceptions, opportunities to serve as a mentor, current position (i.e., principal or assistant principal), outcomes of prior mentoring experience, and personal career trajectory.

Epistemological assumptions are characterized by subjective evidence gained from the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) to close the relational gap between the researcher and the participants. In the study, I utilized language gained from the participants, as well as their personal definitions to guide the collection of interview data. Since epistemological assumptions are based on the “insider” nature of the researcher, I utilized my autobiographical knowledge of the role of an assistant principal and principal to understand the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of school level leaders. In doing so, my focus was on how mentoring is integrated into these opportunities since I have insider knowledge of school leadership and middle level education.

The primary source of data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with five in-service principals and five assistant principals who aspire to be a principal. Two interviews were conducted per participant for a total of 20 interviews. In this study, the use of interview data was an ideal means to inform the two primary research questions and supports the theoretical underpinnings of the research. The romantic conception of
interviewing (Alvesson, 2003; Roulston, 2010) framed the methodology through what could be considered an emotionalist (Silverman, 2001) or connected approach to the research questions and participants. My subjectivity as a middle school principal, positionality as a peer or colleague within a network of schools, and deep interest in the research topic aided in the development of trust and rapport with the participants. As the researcher, “interview talk” was utilized to gather the authentic selves of the participants and me with a continued focus on my subjectivity and positionality to the participants (Roulston, 2010, p. 218). These opportunities allowed the participants to view me as a researcher, fellow school leader, and colleague “in the trenches” which yielded more candid responses in the interviews.

To enhance the quality and ensure the validity of the data collected through the interviews, Kvale’s (1996) six criteria for the quality of interviews were utilized: (1) “The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers from the interview,” (2) “The shorter the interviewer’s questions and the longer the subjects’ answers, the better,” (3) “The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers,” (4) “The ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview,” (5) The interviewer attempts to verify his or her interpretations of the subjects’ answers in the course of the interview,” and (6) The interview is ‘self-communicating’ - it is a story contained in itself that hardly requires much extra descriptions and explanations” (p. 145). Through the romantic conception of interviewing (Alvesson, 2003; Roulston, 2010), the establishment of genuine rapport was prioritized in order to allow the emergence of openness and authenticity of the researcher
and participants. Table 3.1 provides a format of the semi-structured interview protocol that was utilized and tailored to the role of the participants.
Table 3.1

**Research Alignment Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Protocol</th>
<th>Supporting Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1. What type of attributes are evident in principals who demonstrate readiness for mentoring aspiring principals?</td>
<td><strong>Principal - Phase I Interview</strong></td>
<td>The five primary themes of mentorship used to select and assess the readiness of mentors included: 1. Empowering the mentee, 2. Assisting with the navigation of school and district politics, 3. Aligning mentoring curriculum with the context of the role, 4. Identifying and honoring the school’s culture, and 5. Providing a multitude of perspectives to dissect a problem (Bolman &amp; Deal, 1993).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subquestion 1. What attributes are identified as common strengths and areas of growth for principals to demonstrate readiness for mentoring?</td>
<td><strong>Principal - Phase II Interview</strong></td>
<td>Bass and Aviolo (1993) advocate for transformational leaders building the self-confidence of their followers or mentees through the communication of a vision and emphasis on goal attainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assistant Principal - Phase I Interview</strong></td>
<td>The significance of the relationship between the mentor and mentee can be characterized as transformational leadership, which allows the mentee to develop skills and attributes not only for leadership but to also bring about change in an organization or environment (Northhouse, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assistant Principal Phase II Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Principal - Phase I Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Principal - Phase II Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assistant Principal - Phase I Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assistant Principal Phase II Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- To what degree have you engaged in conversations with your principal that are typically more complex or difficult? For example, how do you collaborate on providing equitable, responsive learning opportunities for all students? Do you feel comfortable addressing issues of inequity in the school community?

**RQ 2. How do self-perceptions of principal readiness for mentoring compare to the perceptions of their mentee assistant principals?**

**Principal - Phase I Interview**
- What do you consider a strength regarding mentoring aspiring principals? Area of growth?

**Principal - Phase II Interview**
- In what ways has your assistant principal improved your leadership? Give some examples of leadership strategies and/or ideas that you have learned from your assistant principal.
- What are ways you embed time to prepare and/or support your assistant principal as they aspire to be a principal? How often does this occur?
- What types of clues let you know you are ready to mentor others?
- If you were to put yourself back into an assistant principal’s “shoes,” what would you look for in a mentor principal?

**Assistant Principal - Phase I Interview**
- What do you consider your principal’s greatest strength in preparing you to become a principal? Area of growth?

**Assistant Principal - Phase II Interview**
- What areas in which you feel your principal could support you more as you prepare to become a principal?
- What are ways that your principal embeds time to prepare and/or support your growth as you aspire to be a principal? How often does this occur?
- How do you know that your principal is ready to mentor you as an aspiring principal?

Reciprocal benefits of mentoring are discovered in this study where both participants are benefactors of a community of practice whereby their leadership is sharpened, thus improving the outcomes for the schools under their leadership (Hansen et al., 2002).

When mentors are not prepared or demonstrate readiness for mentoring, they revert to the sharing of their experiences and sets of wisdom in a role that is supervisory in nature (Ambrosetti, 2014).

For the mentor, it is vital to have knowledge of what content is meaningful for the mentee, how to communicate salient points and ideas, and how to assess the knowledge gained by the mentee throughout the process (Gross, 1998, 2009).
Data Collection

Questionnaire

Each participant completed the initial questionnaire prior to conducting the interviews. Data was collected beginning with an initial questionnaire where the participants were asked to include background information (e.g., total years of experience, years of experience as a teacher, years of experience as a school level leader, levels of experience in elementary, middle and high school, quantity of assistant principals under their supervision - both current and past, participant gender and race, etc.). These data were used to provide profile information for the participants to allow me to further explore if mentoring barriers addressed in the literature are present in the data (Ragins, 1997; Scandura & Viator, 1994; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Open ended responses were available for the participants to provide background information on their experiences with mentoring aspiring school leaders. The open ended responses were coded for emerging themes. Data were collected from the South Carolina Department of Education’s (SCDE) School Report Card portal to include the background information to etc. These were collected to provide a profile of the context and setting of each administrative pairing. These data support the diversity of school districts in South Carolina, in order to generalize the findings. The participants’ information allowed me to better understand the context of their experiences, adapt the semi-structured interview questions, and to be able to utilize the details of the participants’ backgrounds throughout the interviews. Protocols for the initial questionnaire included variation depending upon the respondent (i.e. assistant principal or principal) is included in Figure 3.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email address</th>
<th>Email address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First &amp; Last Name</td>
<td>First &amp; Last Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current School</td>
<td>Current School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current School District</td>
<td>Current School District</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which setting best describes your school's location?
- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban

Number of years as principal in your current school.

Total number of years as a principal in your career.

Total number of schools in which you have served as principal.

Total number of assistant principals under your service as principal. *This total should include all school locations.

Do you have experience as a school administrator at a different school level? (e.g., elementary or high school)
- Yes
- No

If you answered yes, please describe your experience at different school level(s). (Leadership role, level, years of experience at the school level, etc.)

Have you had the opportunity to mentor aspiring school leaders in your current professional capacity? If yes, please describe these opportunities.

Sex
- Female
- Male

How would you desire your likelihood to be a principal?
- Highly Likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Very unlikely

If you answered yes, please describe your experience at different school level(s). (Leadership role, level, years of experience at the school level, etc.)
Figure 3.1

*Initial questionnaire for assistant principals and principals*

**Interviews**

A qualitative interview study was the primary method used to collect data to answer the research questions. The 10 participants were interviewed two separate times to gain insight into each participant’s definitions of mentoring, as well as their professional experiences. Following the initial questionnaire, participants were interviewed twice in a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher and the participants to guide the conversation where “questions often emerge in the course of the fieldwork and may add or replace pre-established ones” (Glesne, 2016, p. 96). Turner (2010) noted that a general interview guide will provide more flexibility in how the researcher poses questions and the language used to question the participants that is derived from the participants’ language usage. With two interviews conducted, language and inferences gained during the first interview and utilized to guide the second interview. The first interview provided insight into the conceptualization of
mentoring through the perspectives of the school leaders, which influenced my field notes, memos, and the format in which the questions were structured for the second interview.

Interviews were conducted in the summer of 2021. The timeline and format of the interviews was strongly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which served as a limitation to in-person access to participants based on their personal preferences and district requirements. These interviews were conducted virtually via a Zoom platform to abide by the policies and recommendations of local school districts of guests and visitors in school buildings, as well as to prevent the physical barrier of masks/face coverings to prevent the richness of interaction and conversation. The interviews were recorded through the Zoom platform and secondary mechanism to ensure appropriate storage of the interviews for transcription. A limitation of this platform is that I was limited in in-person interactions with the school leaders in their working environments; however, the video recorded interview allowed for additional reflection and thorough completion of the field notes. Interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes. Since the interviews were recorded through an audiovisual process, I was able to rewatch each interview to gain more insight a minimum of three times per interview. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) noted the importance of active listening, and this was achieved through the reviewing of each interview in order to ensure accurate transcription, recording accurate, detailed field notes, adequately prepare follow-up questions for the second interview, and to begin making connections in the data.

Transcribing of the interviews occurred immediately following the interviews by a third party transcription service and were reviewed for accuracy. The process utilized for transcription was the following: 1) Record the interviews via Zoom, 2) Upload the
recording of the interview to a third party transcription service, 3) Review the transcription for accuracy, 4) Download the interview recording to a media file to access through a mobile device, and 5) Distribute the transcription to the participants to member check for accuracy. In addition to distributing the transcription for accuracy, the participants were asked to ensure accuracy by having the freedom to make any changes, additions, or clarification to the transcription.

**Field Notes and Memos**

Field notes were completed following each interview to provide immediate information for reflection and analysis. As Maxwell (2013) suggests, field notes are a means by which the researcher is able to engage in “serious reflection, analysis, and self-critique, rather than just mechanically recording thoughts and events.” Bogdan and Bicklen (1998) described the mechanism of field notes as what the researcher “hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data” (pp. 107-108). Throughout transcription and review of the audiovisual recordings, field notes were differentiated by their descriptive nature of the participant, setting, and body language, as well as the inferential nature of being able to make sense of the participants’ perceptions and experiences. The field notes and memos for each participant were coded in the data analysis process. The field notes also allowed me to gain a better understanding and insight into the emergent themes of the assistant principal and principal participants. Memoing also took place to provide opportunities for me to reflect on my subjectivity, positionality, related assumptions and genuine interest and engagement in the research topic. The participants’ conceptualization of mentoring as it relates to the literature and my conceptualization were addressed through memos.

**Document Analysis**
A document analysis was conducted to understand resources currently available to South Carolina school districts and its leaders. Districts in the sample size were asked to provide any relevant documents regarding leadership development and mentoring and any strategic plan goals addressed in their accreditation plans. Table 3.2 details the documents available for analysis.

**Table 3.2**

*Document analysis samples*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Available Programs and Corresponding Documents</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE)</td>
<td>Building Instructional Leadership (BIC)</td>
<td>Optional program for assistant principals who aspire to be principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principals Induction Program (PIP)</td>
<td>Required for all induction (first year) principals in South Carolina for certification and tier advancement. Group style mentoring is a component of this program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership Executive Institute (SLEI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Optional program for principals who have 3+ years of experience. Participants are selected by their district as candidates for district wide leadership opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA)</td>
<td>Center for Executive Educational Leadership (CEEL)</td>
<td>Optional program for SCASA assistant principal members to participate in three levels of leadership development (i.e., Silver, Gold, and Platinum levels). Participants pay for each session within the respective strands. Platinum level participants are selected by their districts in collaboration with SCASA as aspiring principals. Individual mentoring is a component of the Platinum level strand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Districts  Davidson School District

Prescriptive leadership mentoring program developed in conjunction with a partner leadership preparation program. The program is designed for induction principals and is facilitated by a district level leader.

Planning and implementation documents from the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) regarding leadership development to include the Building Instructional Leadership (BIC) program, Principals Induction Program (PIP), and the School Leadership Executive Institute (SLEI) were accessed and analyzed to determine common themes in the professional development models adopted at the state level. District level documents regarding any aspiring principal professional development, leadership mentoring, and novice principal support were requested and analyzed for emerging themes of leadership development. The document analysis took place following the interviews. Participants consistently referenced these state-sponsored programs, as well as SCASA’s CEEL Platinum level program for assistant principals. Davidson School District was the only district that supports a leadership mentoring program, and a document containing a purpose statement, required tasks, and skills and dispositions. Documents from these programs were analyzed for emerging themes of leadership development as a part of the larger qualitative study.

**Site selection, criteria, and justification**

For this study, intensity sampling (Patton, 2002) was employed in order to identify participants who brought rich, experiential knowledge and were able to identify who and what is typical with regards to how to improve assistant principals’ self efficacy, knowledge and skill sets, and relational capacity that will allow for embedded support in
the development of school leaders. As Patton (2002) states, “the evaluator may select cases that manifest sufficient intensity to illuminate the nature of successes and failures but not at the extreme” (p. 234). Heuristic research, as described by Patton (2002), utilizes intensity sampling with the researcher’s personal experiences around the research topic.

Sites for this study included intensity samples of middle school assistant principals and principals from middle schools in districts located throughout South Carolina. Criterion for site selection includes: 1. Diverse representations in settings (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural), school size, demographics, and funding allocations (e.g., Title I vs. non Title I), 2. Assistant principals and principals with potential for leadership capacity and mentoring experiences, varying levels of experience (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school), 3. Experiences with receiving or extending mentoring opportunities, and 4. Assistant principals with a desire to pursue the role of a principal, 5. Willingness to engage in critical reflection of their positive and negative mentoring experiences.

Given these criteria, and their relationship to my topic, I chose seven South Carolina middle schools located in different counties that are non-extremes within intense sampling. All middle schools are identified as South Carolina Schools to Watch by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. Schools who are designated as Schools to Watch exemplify a high performing middle grades school that demonstrates excellence within four domains: (1) Academic Excellence, (2) Developmental Responsiveness, (3) Social Equity, and (4) Organizational Structures and Processes. All schools are a part of an alliance that seeks to “disseminate best practice, articulate and
promote effective policies, recognize and develop enlightened leadership, and inform and engage the public” (NFAMGR, 2020). Effective school level leadership is referenced in the mission, vision, and criteria of schools designated as Schools to Watch. For this reason, school level leaders serving in schools demonstrating excellence were selected to participate in the study.

**Participant selection, criteria, and justification**

Intensity sampling (Patton, 2002) of middle school principals in South Carolina was used to select the participant leadership teams in the schools noted in the potential site selection chart. As the researcher, I desired to capture central themes, ideas, common patterns, and variation within school district locations by regions, the schools, districts, and regions were identified based on the schools’ settings, size, demographics, and funding structures. The backgrounds of the school leaders were also of interest to more deeply explore how race, gender, experience, and educational background influence access to mentoring and outcomes based on findings in the literature. Intensity sampling was utilized to identify the principal and assistant principal participants prior to the study. The researcher accessed potential participants through the initial questionnaire provided and narrowed down the sample size through participation in the questionnaire and permission granted from the participants’ employing districts. Intensity sampling methods were critical to the identification of middle grades school leaders who have been designated by the Schools to Watch (NFAMGR, 2020) and the reputation referencing of their assistant principals who aspire to be principals.

The participants consisted of five inservice principals and five inservice assistant principals. As Karneili-Miller et al. (2009) stated, “qualitative inquiry draws on a critical
view of hierarchical relations of power between the research and participants and within participants” (p. 3). In order to avoid the dynamic of power in a supervisory relationship between a principal and assistant principal, the participants were not coupled together in a supervisory manner. For example, the principal participants did not have their corresponding assistant principal participating in the study, and the assistant principals did not have their corresponding, supervising principals as participants.

Keefe and colleagues (1983) described middle school principals as those “perceived as high people orientation, extremely effective in working with parents and the community, and perceived by stakeholders as key to a positive school climate.” Education of the young adolescent has historically been addressed as the turning point for reform in public education, according to the A Nation at Risk (1983) report. In light of this, a truncated regression model conducted in Missouri claimed that middle school principals are 48% more likely to not remain stable in their role, which was supported in a hazard analysis model by Baker and colleagues (2010).

Middle school principals and assistant principals were the primary participants due to the likelihood of their knowledge and past experiences in mentoring at the elementary, middle, and high school level. The South Carolina Department of Education does not recognize specific administrative credentialing requirements for middle level principals. Rather, principals serving in middle schools are credentialed in elementary supervision and/or secondary supervision, which requires them to complete internship experiences at either the elementary or secondary level (SCDE, 2020). The role and responsibilities of a middle school principal and assistant principal are described as a hybrid of the elementary and high school principal where the administrative functions
demand collaboration of stakeholders, a grasp of instructional programming, and oversight of expansive extracurricular opportunities (Fiore, 2004). These varying experiences allowed me to glean participant school leadership experiences beyond their current role in middle school.

The schools organized by region and county are provided by the South Carolina Association of Middle Level Education (SCAMLE) and are part of a Schools to Watch network. Schools to Watch is a framework sponsored by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades reform, and high quality school leadership is an indicator of the 36 criteria of academic excellence, social equity within the environment, and developmental responsiveness (NFAMGR, 2019). Principals serving in National Schools to Watch are evaluated by their staff and a state level team based on the criteria of “principals have the responsibility and authority to hold the school-improvement enterprise together, including day-to-day know-how, coordination, strategic planning, and communication” (NFAMGR, 2019). Intensity sampling also allowed me to identify the uniqueness of the characteristics of each high performing environment based on their district offerings for leadership development, which pivot upon local and state funding allocations for professional development. The primary criterion for selection is involvement in the Schools to Watch network which designates high performing middle grades schools with effective leadership. Table 3.3 outlines the proposed sample pool of school leaders by school and district. Prior to data collection and reporting, the participants, school, and district names were replaced with pseudonyms. The researcher’s school was extracted from the participant pool.
Description of school districts and schools

School districts were selected based on three primary criteria: 1. Designation as a National School to Watch in South Carolina by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 2. Varying geographic locations in South Carolina, and 3. Varying size of school districts as measured by student enrollment. Table 3.2 provides a description of the school districts included in the study (using pseudonyms) to include details on the total student enrollment of each district, the number of middle schools, community settings within the district (e.g., rural, suburban, and urban), and a breakdown of the participants from the respective district.

Additionally, the political and fiscal contexts of the districts varied as evident by their school board and leadership structures and accessibility to resources to invest in mentoring and leadership development. For example, the larger school districts in the sample (e.g., Davidson, Phillipsburg, and Hampstead, Englewood) operate under a political leadership structure that allows for equitable representation of all stakeholders within their district. The context gained through the insight of the participants was that leadership development was a priority of the district and that the district was able to monetarily support mentoring as a priority. In addition to development, leadership salaries were higher, thus making school leadership opportunities in these districts more attractive to aspiring and practicing leaders. The smaller school districts in the sample (e.g., Smithville, Jamestowne, and Garyville) operate under a large political context where the boards of trustees were selected and not necessarily representative of the district as a whole. Despite these districts being smaller by way of population and geography, the political representation was not equitably distributed. Fiscal resources
to invest in leadership development, FTE (full time equivalent) positions for school leadership positions, and compensation through salaries were limited in smaller districts that are also rural. Despite the political leadership structures varying, all members elected to these political bodies operate under a nonpartisan ideology.

Table 3.3

_Description of Participant Districts_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Range of Total Pupil Enrollment</th>
<th>Range of Total Number of Middle Schools in District</th>
<th>Community Settings within the District</th>
<th>Total Number of Participants in the Research Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Davidson</td>
<td>70,000 - 75,000</td>
<td>23 - 26</td>
<td>Rural Suburban</td>
<td>2 principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithville</td>
<td>10,000 - 13,000</td>
<td>4 - 7</td>
<td>Rural Suburban</td>
<td>1 assistant principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillipsburg</td>
<td>25,000 - 28,000</td>
<td>7 - 10</td>
<td>Rural Suburban</td>
<td>1 principal 2 assistant principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampstead</td>
<td>15,000 - 18,000</td>
<td>4 - 7</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>1 principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamestowne</td>
<td>7,000 - 10,000</td>
<td>4 - 7</td>
<td>Rural Suburban</td>
<td>1 assistant principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garyville</td>
<td>1,000 - 3,000</td>
<td>0 - 3</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1 assistant principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Englewood</td>
<td>45,000 - 50,000</td>
<td>14 - 16</td>
<td>Suburban Urban</td>
<td>1 principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(South Carolina Department of Education, 2021)

The intensity samples of schools selected are all designated as Schools to Watch by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. The school leadership teams in the designated schools are evaluated on 36 criteria under four domains including Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness, Social Equity, and Organizational
Structures and Processes. Principals serving in these high-performing middle grades schools are evaluated by their staff and a visiting evaluation team based on the criteria that “principals have the responsibility and authority to hold the school-improvement enterprise together, included day-to-day know-how, coordination, strategic planning, and communication” (NFAMGR, 2019). Of the 80 school districts in South Carolina, 16 districts have middle grades schools that are designated as Schools to Watch. There are 27 schools within the 16 districts who hold this designation.

Given these criteria, I reached out to all 16 districts and was successful in securing seven participant districts. All necessary district procedures to obtain permission to conduct research were satisfied to include the completion of district specific forms, provision of informed consent documents, and communication of IRB exemption. I was unsuccessful in securing the remaining nine districts for various reasons to include administrative turnover at the district and/or school level, non approval of research requests during the summer months, administrative contracts not extending through the summer for assistant principals, non approval of research requests due to fatigue from the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021 school year, etc.

Table 3.3 outlines the individual participants’ school environments. This table contains more details about the varying sizes, socioeconomics, community contexts, and years that the school has been designated as a School to Watch. These characteristics provide insight into the diversity in the school settings as well as their commitment to upholding the 36 criteria of being designated as a School to Watch.
### Table 3.4

**Description of Participants’ School Settings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Community Setting</th>
<th>Range of Total Pupil Enrollment</th>
<th>Poverty Index %</th>
<th>Total Number of Years as a School to Watch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>Davidson</td>
<td>Red Middle School</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>800 - 850</td>
<td>50.20%</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>Davidson</td>
<td>Orange Middle School</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>700 - 750</td>
<td>40.50%</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>Hampstead</td>
<td>Yellow Middle School</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>1,000 - 1,200</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal D</td>
<td>Phillipsburg</td>
<td>Green Middle School</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1,000 - 1,200</td>
<td>67.80%</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal E</td>
<td>Englewood</td>
<td>Blue Middle School</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1,200 - 1,300</td>
<td>65.40%</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal A</td>
<td>Garyville</td>
<td>Purple Middle School</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>450 - 500</td>
<td>73.00%</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal B</td>
<td>Smithville</td>
<td>Pink Middle School</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>700 - 750</td>
<td>52.30%</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal C</td>
<td>Jamestowne</td>
<td>Beige Middle School</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>400 - 450</td>
<td>82.70%</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal D</td>
<td>Phillipsburg</td>
<td>Gray Middle School</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>850 - 900</td>
<td>39.70%</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal E</td>
<td>Phillipsburg</td>
<td>Gray Middle School</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>850 - 900</td>
<td>39.70%</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Description of participants

Prior to recruiting participants, I sent individual emails to the district level administrators who oversee the research of human subjects in the 16 South Carolina school districts with School to Watch schools. The process of obtaining permission to conduct research with employees varied according to the policies and procedures of each district; however, all districts were able to access my research questions, overview of the intended research process, ethical considerations for the study, an example of the informed consent document, the Non Human Research letter from the Institutional Review Board at the University of South Carolina, and the timeline for completing the study. Four of the seven districts required that this information be included in a district form, and this information was completed as required by the district. As each district granted permission to contact their employees, I sent an email to all assistant principals and principals in the School to Watch middle schools in the district to introduce myself, provide an overview of the study, timeline, and approximate time they would need to allocate to participate in the study. Five principals and five assistant principals from nine schools in seven different districts were successfully recruited to participate in the study. The participants are described below in two categories of principals and assistant principals and are listed in the descriptions below in the chronological order in which permission was obtained from their employing district.

Principals

The five principal participants are geographically located in various areas of the state from the Piedmont to Low Country geographic regions of South Carolina. They represent diverse community settings with three from urban districts (Principals A, D,
and E), one from a suburban district (Principal C), and one from a rural district (Principal B). Their school populations range from 750 to 1,250 students, which is above the average enrollment of 641 students in middle schools in South Carolina (SCDE, 2021). All five principal participants' experiences as principals have taken place in middle schools in their current school. The experience levels ranged from five to nine years of service as principals, all of which is in their current setting. Four of the five participants (Principals A, B, C, and E) have all years of prior service as teachers, instructional coaches, and assistant principals in middle schools in their current district. One participant (Principal D) previously served as a teacher in her current school and left to gain administrative experience as an assistant principal in a high school in her district and then returned to her current school as an assistant principal and was promoted to principal. Two of the five participants (Principals C and D) were promoted from assistant principal to principal in the same school, and three of the five participants (Principals A, B, and E) were promoted from assistant principal of a different middle school in their districts to principal in their current setting.

Each principal participant was asked to describe any previous experience or opportunities that they have had to mentor aspiring principals in their professional capacity. Two participants (Principal A and Principal B) detailed their experience beyond mentoring their previous and current assistant principals through mentor training through their district’s programming. This program was described as a peer mentoring system where experienced principals were selected and trained to provide support to new principals and/or principals moving into the district. Principal C described her mentoring experience solely to that of opportunities with her previous and current assistant
principals. In her first interview, Principal C spoke about an upcoming experience to mentor an aspiring principal through the South Carolina Association of School Administrator’s (SCASA) Center for Executive Education Leadership (CEEL) program. Principal D noted prior experience in working with the Developing Aspiring Principals Program (DAPP) through the Office of School Leadership in the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE). Principal E only noted mentor experience with his previous and current assistant principals.

Table 3.4 provides a visual description of each participant by sex, race/ethnicity, current school, current district, their total years as a principal, the number of assistant principals they have supervised in their tenure as a principal, educational experiences at different levels (e.g., elementary or high school), and their descriptions of the opportunities they have had to serve as a mentor. These principal participants are listed in the order in which their employing districts granted permission to participate in the research, which determined the order in which they were contacted and interviewed in the study.

**Assistant Principals**

The five assistant principal participants have less geographic diversity than the principals and are geographically located in the Midlands area of South Carolina. Their school community settings were described as primarily rural or suburban. The student enrollment of their schools ranges from 425 to 850 students. Unlike the principal participants, four of the five assistant principal participants (Assistant Principals A, B, C, and D) have teaching and/or administrative experience in either an elementary or high school. Additionally, all of the assistant principals had experience teaching outside of
their current district and had the opportunity to move into administrative roles in different districts. All five assistant principals experience has been in the district in which they move into to serve as school leaders. The assistant principal participants’ experience ranges from four to eight years. One participant (Assistant Principal C) had school leadership experience as a high school administrator, one participant (Assistant Principal B) had school leadership experience as an elementary school administrator, and three participants (Assistant Principals A, D, and E) had school leadership experience solely in middle school. Three of the participants (Assistant Principals B, D, and E) noted experience as school level instructional coaches prior to moving into the role of assistant principal, and two of the participants (Assistant Principals A and C) moved into their role from being classroom teachers. Assistant Principal D began his career as a high school teacher, then changed careers to serve as a computer programmer for a large, public company. Following ten years of service in a noneducational setting, he returned to teaching and instructional coaching for four years prior to moving into the assistant principal role in his current school. Two of the participants (Assistant Principals D and E) are currently serving in the same school under the same supervising principal. For the purpose of this study, principal and assistant principal participants were decoupled, in order to avoid the dynamic of power in a supervisory relationship between a principal and assistant principal. Individual experiences of the assistant principals remained the focus of the research study as opposed to organizational qualities.

Each assistant principal participant was asked to describe any previous experience or opportunities that they have had to receive mentoring aspiring principals. All five assistant principals noted involvement in district level professional development.
programs that focus on their roles as assistant principals with a secondary focus on
developing them as aspiring principals. Three participants (Assistant Principals A, D,
and E) have completed the CEEL Platinum level program through SCASA, which is the
third and highest level of professional development offered for aspiring principals
through this state level organization. These same participants noted completion of the
APPLE program through the SCDE, which is now known as the Instructional Leadership
Academy (ILA). This program is designed to support first and second year assistant
principals. Assistant Principal B has completed the Developing Aspiring Principal
Program (DAPP) through the SCDE. Assistant Principal C did not note any formal
professional development outside of his district’s offerings.

Tables 3.4 and 3.5 provides a visual description of each participant by sex,
race/ethnicity, current school, current district, their total years as an assistant principal,
the number of supervising principals in their time as an assistant principal, educational
experiences at different levels (e.g., elementary or high school), and their descriptions of
the opportunities they have had to receive mentoring as an aspiring principal. These
assistant principal participants are listed in the order in which their employing districts
granted permission to participate in the research, which determined the order in which
they were contacted and interviewed in the stud
Table 3.5

*Principal Experience Profile*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
<th>Principal C</th>
<th>Principal D</th>
<th>Principal E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle School</strong></td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School District</strong></td>
<td>Davidson</td>
<td>Davidson</td>
<td>Hampstead</td>
<td>Phillipsburg</td>
<td>Englewood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Years in Current School</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Years as a Principal</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Assistant Principals</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience at Other Educational Levels</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, 5 years as a High School Assistant Principal</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Description of Opportunities to Mentor Aspiring Principals

“Yes. In addition to mentoring my APs, I am a principal mentor for Davidson Schools and have mentored two, new principals over the last four years. I have also been a mentor to colleagues going through their internships for their degrees in school leadership. I have mentored eight getting their leadership degrees. I have mentored two unofficially in leadership development. One of those has moved into leadership roles. Five of the eight have gone on to administration.”

“Yes, beyond the typical situation of mentoring APs who are my direct reports, I'm formally trained and have served as a mentor to "new" principals. In this role I have mentored two different principals. One was a brand new first year principal and the other a principal new to our district but who had prior years experience.”

“No, but I will be a mentor for SCASA’s CEEL program this upcoming school year for an assistant principal.”

“Yes, I worked with aspiring principals through DAPP (Developing Aspiring Principals Program).”

“No.”
Table 3.6

*Assistant Principal Experience Profile*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Assistant Principal A</th>
<th>Assistant Principal B</th>
<th>Assistant Principal C</th>
<th>Assistant Principal D</th>
<th>Assistant Principal E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>Beige</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School District</strong></td>
<td>Garyville</td>
<td>Smithville</td>
<td>Jamestowne</td>
<td>Phillipsburg</td>
<td>Phillipsburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Years as an Assistant Principal</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Principals Under Whom You Have Served as Assistant Principal</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience at Other Educational Levels</strong></td>
<td>Yes, high school teaching experience</td>
<td>Yes, 3 years as an elementary assistant principal</td>
<td>Yes, 1 year as a high school assistant principal and all teaching experience was in a high school.</td>
<td>Yes, 6 years as a high school teacher. Changed careers for 10 years, then returned to teaching in a middle school.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to Receive Mentoring as an Aspiring School Leader</td>
<td>“Yes, I have participated in leadership PD programs through our district. I have also participated in SC SDE's APPLE program and SCASA's CEEL program, now entering the Platinum year.”</td>
<td>“I completed DAPP where I was mentored by a principal in my district.”</td>
<td>“No, not in the traditional sense.”</td>
<td>“Leading Up - District opportunity for developing leaders to lead from where they are. APPLE - state department opportunity for first year assistant principals. CEEL - Platinum level Assistant Principal training provided through SCASA”</td>
<td>“I have completed all levels of the SCASA CEEL, APPLE for 1st Year APs, and also a district Leadership Academy.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Coding

For the purpose of this study, coding identified “themes, patterns, and processes; to make comparisons and to build theoretical expectations” (Glesne, 2016, p. 195). Thematic analysis was utilized to develop themes. The data collected from the questionnaire, interviews, field notes, and applicable and available documents were analyzed and organized based on one or a combination the following preliminary themes: (1) themes of prior leadership mentoring or coaching, (2) typologies of experiences that influence readiness, (3) the extent to which specific attributes emerge, (4) the relationship between the perceptions of the in-service principal and their corresponding assistant principal, and (5) actionable items to be addressed to demonstrate readiness. These categories were developed under the assumption that they would influence a principal's readiness to mentor. For example, the length and breadth (i.e., multiple levels of experience with varying age groups of students) of experiences might influence the perspective that a mentor might have, thus influencing their readiness for mentoring.

Data analysis began with the coding of the data collected from the initial questionnaire, followed by the data collected from the first interview. Then, coding of the data collected from the second interview occurred. The field notes were utilized to assist in the coding process to be able to identify categories within the data and to provide inferential links in the data gathered from all participants. The document analysis of district and state level documents provided an explanation of the goals and objectives of the mentoring programs described in the participants’ experiences. The data collected from the questionnaire were cross referenced with the interview data from principals and
assistant principals. Keywords that were searched for include: experience, capabilities, confidence, time, opportunities, support, and guidance. These preliminary keywords were influenced by Bandura’s self-efficacy beliefs (1977, 1986, 1997), which are elements of his social cognitive theory. Keywords that emerged in the data included mentoring, coaching, priority, talent development, learning, collaboration, problem solving, and networking. As Glesne (2016) suggests, this process revealed the complexities existing below the surface and explained the similarities and differences between the sets of interview data collected from both sets of school leaders.

Vaismoradi et al. (2016) described four phases of theme development within a thematic analysis. Figure 4.5 outlines the strategies I used within the four phases of theme development: (1) Initialization, (2) Construction, (3) Rectification, and (4) Finalization. Within thematic analysis, phases of theme development are outlined in Figure 3.2.

**Initialization**
- In depth review of interview transcription to include reviewing the audiovisual recording while reading the final transcription.
- Open coding occurred where the researcher began to develop initial categories of data and made comparisons to that of the preliminary themes.
- Construction of in-depth field notes as a means to describe and make inferences from each interview. The field notes were organized by participants for both interviews, as well as by participant groups (i.e., principal participants and assistant principal participants).
- Snowball sampling occurred for the document analysis where the researcher gradually gained access to different leadership development programs that were not included in the initial data collection process (e.g., SCASA’s Center for Executive Education Leadership participation levels).

**Construction**
- The categories developed in the open coding process in the initialization stage formed groups.
Connections in the data from each participant were made to identify language specific context. For example, the participants’ definitions and experiences highlighted in the first interview were referenced in the second interview to allow the participant the opportunity to expand on the richness of their experiences.

Data was organized into a graphic representation to include thematic links within the participant groups, participants based on their length of experience, and the district context of each participant.

**Rectification**

- The field notes and memos created in the initialization phase were consistently referenced to allow the researcher to make inferences based on the experiences of the participant, as well as the researcher’s personal experiences in school leadership. The field notes also allowed the researcher the opportunity to reflect on her subjectivity throughout the data collection process.
- Emergent themes from the construction phase were connected to the literature. For example, barriers to mentoring were strongly referenced from the principal participant group.

**Finalization**

- Findings are reported based on the answering of the primary research questions through descriptive and interpretive themes. A schematic design captures these findings.

**Figure 3.2**

*Vaismoradi et al. (2016) phases of theme development*

**Trustworthiness**

The purpose of the study is to identify the readiness of in-service principals to mentor their current assistant principals as they aspire to be principals. A linear model produced to focus on the trustworthiness was developed by Sinkovics et al. (2008), which was based on a model produced by Iacobucci and Churchill (2010). The linear progression of qualitative research is modeled in six stages: (1) Generating a topic
through a review of the literature, (2) Developing research questions and design (3) Selection of a sample or participants based on research design, (4) Collection of empirical data and preparation for analysis, (5) Formal analysis of the empirical data and linking to theoretical framework, (6) Interpretation and discussion of the findings. Additionally, Merriam (1995) stated that trustworthiness is evident in how well a study does what it is designed and to what degree validity, reliability, and generalization are supported by the strategies employed in the study.

Within the romantic conception of interviewing, Alvesson (2003) and Roulston (2010) define six key strategies to ensure trustworthiness of interview studies conducted by researchers who seek to establish rapport through trusting and caring relationships. Table 3.6 outlines the strategies constructed by Alvesson (2003) and Roulston (2010) to ensure trustworthiness within the romantic conception of interviewing:

**Table 3.7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Relevance to the Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple data collection methods</td>
<td>Interviews are supplemented with a document analysis of district and state mentoring plans to triangulate data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple interviews with participants</td>
<td>An ongoing relationship with participants was established to strengthen rapport. The language gathered from the participant in the first interview was noted to guide the questioning in the second interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity of fieldwork</td>
<td>The ongoing relationship between the researcher and participants was addressed through continuous evaluation of my subjectivity and positionality to the participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to ethical issues</td>
<td>Member checking was incorporated to ensure that a thorough understanding and accurate inferences have been attained from the participants. Additionally, confidentiality was maintained with assignments of pseudonyms for the participants and their current and previous schools and districts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of the sequencing of questions

Interview questions were structured in a pattern that is consistent across the interviews as to not negatively impact the collection of data. This will allow scaffolding of the questions to allow for more sensitive or controversial questions to follow questions that are intended to define mentoring and gather background knowledge of the participants.

Transparency of research process

The interview protocol was provided in the findings along with field notes, memos, and interview transcriptions. Inferences and findings were supported by sufficient data.

Researchers contributions to interview talk

The final report will include the researcher’s interview talk throughout the study. This will provide insight into how the researcher influenced the depth of the participants’ responses.

Validity

“All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (Merriam, 2009, p. 209). In this study, validity was strengthened through the use of triangulation. Creswell and Miller (2000) defined triangulation as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p. 126). For the purpose of this study, triangulation took place using three primary sources of data:

**Interview transcription.** Transcription from semi-structured interviews from five in-service principals and five assistant principals. Each participant was interviewed twice for a total of 20 interviews. Interviews served as a primary source of data. In order to gain insight into the readiness of in-service principals to mentor their assistant principals, I coded the data according to general themes from all interviews, as well as the comparison of themes amongst the participant groups. Respondent validation, or member checking, was used to verify the participants’ responses and my interpretation of
the data. Participants received a copy of the interview transcription to correct any “errors of fact or interpretation” (Simon, 2011).

**Participant background questionnaire.** The initial questionnaire provided background information to inform me of the previous experiences and that may influence the perceptions of the participants.

**Analysis of documents.** Available documents from the state education agency and local school districts that outline policies and/or programs for leadership mentoring were reviewed.

**Field notes and memos.** Field notes and memos were utilized to record descriptive and inferential notes from the semi-structured interviews.

**Reliability**

Patton (2002) claims that validity and reliability should be of importance to qualitative researchers as they design a study, analyze results, and judge the overall quality of a study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that reliability qualitative research more closely aligns with the term dependability, and they further indicate that an “inquiry audit” is a strategy used to enhance reliability.

Reliability in this study was established through the use of interview guides to ensure that all participants are asked consistent questions (Yin, 2009). Prior to the study, practice interviews were conducted with pilot participants (i.e., one principal and one assistant principal) who met the criteria for study but were not included due to the positionality of the researcher to the pilot participants. This was done to allow me the opportunity to ensure that the questions in interview protocol were clearly worded for the participants and designed to glean information from the participants to support the
study’s research questions. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed the participants to give open-ended responses, thus allowing for a multitude of responses. Respondent validation (i.e., member checking) occurred to allow the participants an opportunity to provide feedback on the accuracy of the data and its interpretation.

**Transferability**

Transferability in qualitative research is determined by the applicability of the research process to outsiders or the interpretive equivalent of generalizability in quantitative research (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Bitsch (2005) stated researchers “facilitates the transferability judgement by a potential user through ‘thick description’ and purposeful sampling” (p. 85). Through the “thick descriptions” users are able to determine how the methodology and context can be replicated under similar circumstances (Li, 2004). Although the transferability of this study was determined through the judgement of a potential user (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), transferability is encouraged by providing thorough, in-depth accounts of sampling, site and participant selection justification, a detailed interview protocol, and a detailed account of the experiences as a researcher during data collection.

**Role of the Researcher**

**Positionality and Subjectivity Statements**

Positionality describes an “individual’s worldview and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (Rowe, 2014,p. 3; Darwin-Holmes, 2020). The individual’s worldview is shaped by three assumptions: 1. Ontological assumptions (what they know about the world), epistemological assumptions (beliefs about the nature of knowledge), and 3. Assumptions about “human nature and agency” or the means in which the individual interacts with their environment (Bahari,
A researcher’s positionality is constructed from various factors to include their race, gender, social class, sexuality, religious practices, political affiliations, etc. (Sikes, 2004; Marsh et al., 2018; Darwin-Holmes, 2020).

My positionality “reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 71). I am a white, middle class female, and I live and work in Lexington County, South Carolina. I have been employed in the South Carolina public school system for 18 years as a middle school teacher, athletic coach, assistant principal, and now principal. I have had the opportunity to experience mentoring in preparation for the principalship and am currently working closely alongside an assistant principal.

My professional experience has been influenced by involvement in organizations to include the South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education (SCAMLE), the South Carolina Association for School Administrators (SCASA), and the South Carolina Schools to Watch team, and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform (NFAMGR). It is through these organizations that I have been privileged to develop a network of job-alike professionals and to interact with a number of the participants prior to this study being conducted. I have had the opportunity to participate in networking events, conferences, roundtable discussions, presentations, and site visits to their respective schools.

According to Glesne (2016), subjectivity is viewed as the researcher’s emotional state in different research situations that is influenced by their autobiographical state. Glesne (2016) goes on to discuss the inability of qualitative researchers escaping their beliefs, experiences, and individual histories. Additionally, Peshkin (1988) encourages
researchers to address their subjective I’s in the research process, and I have addressed
my subjective I’s below.

*Relational Capacity I.* The foundation of my Relational Capacity I stems from
my extroverted nature, a means in which I seek connections with others. It is my
belief that I uncovered commonalities and developed rapport with those of whom
I am unfamiliar. A strength of this subjective I is that I bring a skillset to develop
rapport with research participants. In this study, I recognized that not all
participants identify relational capacity as a personal strength and how this may
limit their willingness to mentor aspiring principals. It is also important to note
that extrovertedness may not necessarily be the defining characteristic of a
successful mentor.

*Problem-Solver I.* In my roles as a school leader, wife, and mother, I inherently
seek to find and offer solutions to problems, both current and potential.
Troubleshooting issues excites and challenges me in my daily living and were
acknowledged in the research to avoid offering solutions, advice for
improvement, or misrepresenting the participants’ views on mentoring.

*Self-Assurance I.* The objective of the study is to measure the attributes of in-
service principals and their readiness to mentor their assistant principals;
however, I do not claim to be an expert in practice. I recognize that I often lack
self-assurance or confidence in my attributes to approach the mentoring of
aspiring principals. Recognizing the questioning of my personal level of self-
assurance was critical to the reliability of the data as I strived to maintain focus on
the attributes, confidence, and efficacy of the participants.
Given the autobiographical influence of this study, there were key assumptions to unpack. Based on my experiences as an aspiring and in-service principal, there are five assumptions associated with this study. First, this study assumes that the relationship between an assistant principal and mentoring principal is critical in developing the leadership pipeline in a school and community. Positive relational capacity lends itself to progressive, bidirectional feedback and the challenging of ideals and beliefs. In the case of mentoring, trust is a direct influence of relational capacity. “Trust is a dynamic construct in that it can change over the course of a relationship, as the nature of the interdependence between two people changes, and as expectations are either fulfilled or disappointed” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p. 258). My subjectivity was influenced by the positive relationships that I have built with my previous supervising principal and current assistant principals. These relationships have served as foundational to honest, reflective dialogue that has yielded learning and opportunities for preparation. To assume that all school leaders, principals and assistant principals, have access to these relationships was impactful to the study.

Secondly, the study assumed that districts have manipulated the working conditions and expectations to be reasonable and foundational to the success of its principals. The American Association of Superintendents (AASA) developed a counterintuitive list of what not to do to support principals and provided cautionary tales of how districts often contribute to principal attrition. Amongst the “what not to do items listed,” the AASA noted that in order for districts to not diminish the eagerness and optimism of new principals they must refrain from providing insurmountable school level challenges, requiring excessive and unnecessary paperwork and procedures, isolation,
compromising their autonomy, and avoiding praise and reinforcement of positive leadership qualities (McDaniel & Gruenert, 2018). It is assumed that districts and states are providing support for novice principals based on this literature, as well as the professional growth for aspiring principals.

Next, the study assumed that adult learning is influenced by readiness and motivation to learn. Readiness and motivation on the part of the mentor and mentee are necessary for the success of a mentoring relationship. Adult learning in informal and formal experiences is based on five assumptions according to Malcolm Knowles (2002): self concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn (Scully, 2011, p. 57-59). In this assumption, it was necessary for me to uncover the professional trajectory of the assistant principals when attempting to describe their path. For example, some assistant principals do not desire to become principals regardless of access to mentoring, and it was critical to identify this as an influential dynamic in the study and in the development of the principalship pipeline.

Based on the literature, gender plays a secondary role in mentoring which is supported by Ragins (1997) and Scandura & Viator (1994). According to this literature, female mentors have a stronger tendency to support the psychosocial development of their mentees due to more nurturing characteristics (Okurame, 2007; Fairhurst, 1993). As a female who has previously received mentoring from a male and currently provides mentoring to a male aspiring principal, the assumption of traditional gender roles was unpacked to more closely examine gender as a barrier or opportunity during data collection. As a female school leader, I assumed that females in the role of principal have had the opportunity to experience mentoring through the lens of a mentor and mentee
Finally, the study assumed the lack of mentorship to be a limitation for principals as they transition into the role of principal regardless of the needs of school communities. However, it was assumed that the turnover and lack of support for school leaders who serve or seek to serve as principals in high needs schools is evident by the capitalization of opportunities for principals to move to schools with less need. The profound implications for lack of principal support leading to turnover is crippling for schools as they seek elicit improvement in a school environment.

**Insider and Outsider**

“As a qualitative researcher, I do not think being an insider makes me a better or worse researcher; it just makes me a different type of researcher. Perhaps because of my background, I have always engaged in much self-reflection, and I continue to do so in my research” (Dwyer, 2009, p. 58). Similar to the view of Dwyer, having an insider approach to the study provided insight on the roles and responsibilities of middle school leaders, as well as the key advantages of having a positive mentoring relationship. In this study, I was an insider based on my current role of a school principal, as well as having experience with being mentored, mentoring, and leadership development from district and state levels. Additionally, an advantage to being an insider to the research is summarized by researchers who share a common identity, language and experiential base (Kanuha, 2000), and these elements often lead to a greater depth of data collection (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).
My insider status as a middle school principal within the School to Watch network presented advantages in building and maintaining rapport with the participants through my conception of interviewing. I have had the opportunity to engage in professional collaboration with some of the principal participants through the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform advocacy and professional development offerings, the South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education (SC-AMLE), and the South Carolina Association for School Administrators (SCASA). In some cases, I have had the opportunity to experience state level professional development as induction and early career principals. In this network, we have an opportunity as principals to showcase specialties or strategies that our schools are utilizing as best practices for adolescent learning. As of the start of the study, I had limited to no interaction with any of the potential assistant principal participants in the Schools to Watch network.

Serrant-Greene (2002) noted “there appear to be as many arguments for outsider research as against, with the same issues able to be raised in support of outsider research as against it (p. 38).” Removing myself from being a “member of the club,” I have not been employed in the districts in which the participants are currently serving nor had the opportunity to access any district level leadership development of which the participants have accessed. Consequently, I also vary in years of service and levels of experience as that of the participants.

While the statewide network of middle school principals is a closely connected group that participates in middle grades education professional development and larger, transcending leadership networks, I have personally interacted with very few of the principal participants and none of the assistant principal participants. That said, I was
positioned as both an insider and outsider based on the commonalities I share with the participants as a middle grades school leader in a nationally designated high performing school, but an outsider as I have limited knowledge of their school and district context or their personal experiences as school leaders, in some cases.

**Study Implications**

**Ethical issues**

*Respect the privacy of the participants.* I assigned a pseudonym to serve in the absence of the name of the participant, school, and district, in order to respect confidentiality and privacy of the participant. This allowed the participants to provide more accurate, unbiased feedback on the nature of their professional relationship with their principal or assistant principal.

*Avoid disclosing information that would harm participants.* It is critical to understand that the data collected on the professional relationship between an assistant principal and principal may negatively influence the assistant principal’s professional trajectory and promotion potential in a school district and/or community. Additionally, it was critical to allow the relationship between the principal and assistant principal to remain uncompromised.

*Communicate in clear, straightforward, and appropriate language.* I designed the interview questions to include clear, concise language. Participants were able to understand the language of the survey and be clear on the purpose of the individual items.

*Avoid going “native.”* I avoided over or underreporting data with an understanding that data collected from the study could provide evidence to support or refute the hypothesis. I reported accurate data collected from the research participants.
(Creswell & Creswell, 2018), and member checking was utilized as a means of obtaining participant feedback and to avoid misrepresentation of the participants’ perspective or biases (Maxwell, 2013).

**Risks and benefit**

The potential risks associated with interviewing principals on their perceptions of their assistant principals posed a risk of them disclosing information about the professional trajectory of their subordinates. As mentioned in the ethical considerations, maximizing confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and not directly quoting the participants occurred. Additionally, it was vital for me to recognize any dysfunctional mentoring behaviors, to include negative relationships, relationship difficulties stemming from good intent, spoiling, and submissiveness (Williams et al., 2009; McClary, 2019; Crow & Matthews, 1998).

Benefits of the study include increased opportunities for mentoring in the professional context of school leadership, which will lead to higher job satisfaction, retention of principals in struggling schools, and collegial networks of school leaders (Wallace Foundation, 2016). “Because behavior change is slow and relies on opportunities for practice and reinforcement, leadership preparation, professional development, and mentoring are mechanisms for facilitating movement along the leadership continuum” (Schulze, et al., 2018, p. 24). In the influence of behaviors, mentors are able to invite proteges into their practice. Through an invitational approach mentees are able to not only observe but to be reflective in their current practice and practice over time (Rogoff et al., 2003).
Conclusion

To effectively address the research questions in this study, a qualitative approach was utilized. Qualitative data were collected from an initial questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field notes. In this chapter, an explanation of the site and participant selections, as well as data collection and analysis. Researcher subjectivity and positionality have been addressed, and potential ethical considerations have been reviewed as implications.
CHAPTER 4:

FINDINGS

Introduction to Chapter

In Chapter 4, findings from the qualitative interview study will be reviewed. The two primary research questions guided the collection of data, which were organized in themes. In this study, principals and assistant principals were interviewed to gather their perceptions of mentoring readiness and the skills and attributes that are evident in principals who are ready to serve as mentors. Individual interviews with assistant principals and principals were conducted in nine different middle schools across seven South Carolina school districts. The study focused on identifying leadership exemplars in South Carolina School to Watch schools, as well as their availability and desire to contribute knowledge on the participants’ leadership development practices.

The data from all interviews, document analyses, field notes, and memos were transcribed, coded, and organized to answer the research questions. Descriptions of the participants’ school districts, schools, and leadership experiences are included in Chapter 4, in order to better understand the school leadership context of each participant. The themes and interpretations of the findings will be reviewed in detail in this chapter.

The chapter will conclude with the theoretical lenses through which this study was conducted include Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (1985) and Bandura’s Social Cognitive theory (1977, 1986). These theories allowed me to
understand how adult learning and embracement of mentoring within their role is shaped by critical reflection and how a learner’s beliefs are shaped through constructs of mentoring to include direct experience, observation, and modeling.

**Thematic Analysis**

Upon completion of the coding of the initial questionnaire, document analysis, and transcription from the 20 semi-structured interviews, three primary themes emerged. These themes include: (1) Long term goals of the mentee assistant principal influencing the outcomes of mentoring, (2) Evidence of servant leadership characteristics (Greenleaf, 1977), and (3) Barriers that mask mentoring attributes. Various sub themes are outlined in this section in support of the primary, emergent themes. In this section that details the emergent themes, there is evidence of overlap in participant quotes which support the development of the themes. For example, a participant's quote regarding the development of trust as a characteristic of servant leadership and as a condition that supports the development of a mentoring relationship. The lack of trust between a mentor and mentee surfaces as a barrier.

The primary source of data collection in the study was the 20 semi-structured interviews. The document analysis became a secondary tool for data collection and did not provide illumination or support as originally predicted. The process of the document analysis could be described as a “snowball,” meaning additional documents or programs that were sponsored by the SCDE, SCASA or individual districts typically surfaced during the process of the interviews. Analysis of these documents and programs provided programmatic objectives, timelines, participants, etc.; however, the programs’ fidelity as described in the documents was referenced by all participants in the semi-
structured interviews. More information was gleaned from the participants’ perceptions of the programs included in the document analysis.

The schematic design included in Table 4.1 provides an overview of the findings as they relate to the research questions and levels of coding. Figure 4.1 provides an introduction of the three primary themes and sub themes included as a roadmap through the analysis of data and findings.
Figure 4.1.

Introduction to the development of theme
### Table 4.1

*Schematic diagram: Level 1 and 2 coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ 1. What type of attributes are evident in principals who demonstrate readiness for mentoring aspiring principals?</th>
<th>RQ 2. How do self perceptions of principal readiness for mentoring compare to the perceptions of their mentee assistant principals?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subquestion 1. What attributes are identified as common strengths and areas of growth for principals to demonstrate readiness for mentoring?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Differentiating between mentoring and coaching</td>
<td>- The importance of attributes exceeds skills developed during leadership experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pros and cons of formal and informal willingness</td>
<td>- Reciprocal understanding of desired outcomes of mentoring,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Willingness to influence</td>
<td>- Communication and commitment to career trajectory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Willingness to serve (e.g., servant leadership)</td>
<td>- Collaboration through partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Exploration of supplementary development strategies</td>
<td>- Openness of reverse mentoring opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mentoring as a district and/or state priority</td>
<td>- Willingness to engage in honest, open communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Barriers that mask attributes and interfere with readiness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Situational addresses crisis/deficit mentoring and career trajectory mentoring.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Imparting necessary experiences and knowledge to influence readiness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Coding (Level 1 Coding)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mentor as servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1970)</td>
<td>- Goals based mentoring to influence trajectory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Barriers that mask mentoring attributes</td>
<td>- A mentor’s attributes as a vehicle to share experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category Codes (Level 2 Coding)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goals-based, trajectory mentoring

The desire of the assistant principal to become a principal was the most dominant theme that emerged during the interviews. In this section, participants’ data pertaining to their goals related to their professional trajectory, and actionable mentoring will be described. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the assistant principal participants and their self perceived desire to move into a principalship.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal A</td>
<td>Possesses long-term goals of being a principal “when the time is right.” He is also interested in district level leadership at some point in his career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal B</td>
<td>“I would be the principal of dirt.” Possesses a strong desire to be a principal and is actively awaiting the opportunity to promote into the role and has communicated this to her district, executive leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal C</td>
<td>“Yes, I do want to move into the role at some point. I just want to make sure that I’m ready and others are confident that I’m ready.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal D</td>
<td>“If there is a place for me to lead, then that opportunity will present itself. I’m not closing any doors, but I’m not beating them down either.” His readiness was highlighted through his participation in the SCASA CEEL Platinum strand where he scored exceptionally high on the readiness assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal E</td>
<td>Desire is “hot and cold, meaning some days she is ‘very ready’ and some there is a ‘no way’ feeling.” Possesses a high degree of institutional knowledge and has a willingness to remain serving in any capacity needed in her community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The principal participants wholeheartedly agreed that an assistant principal’s desire and ambition to become a principal was the driving force behind their urgency in preparation and readiness. They each described past and present examples of assistant principals who “clung to knowledge and wisdom” because of their belief that the assistant principal’s trajectory influenced their willingness to learn and to be mentored. The participants were able to detail the characteristics of their assistant principals who are able to lead instruction, positively impact school culture, manage the complexities and fluctuations of the roles and responsibilities, and facilitate engagement with the community. The literature supports these elements of instructional impact and supports their importance in not only principal readiness, but also successful outcomes of school leaders (Fullan, 2001; Marzano, 2005; Hitt & Tucker, 2015). In addition to these readiness characteristics, the principal participants were also able to differentiate between assistant principals who were ready, those that need more “fine tuning” with time and experience, and those who either self-identify as not ready or have been identified as not ready by their principal. Essentially, there were referenced assistant principals who the principals indicated possessed a high degree of self efficacy. This was the attribute that summarizes the principal participants’ perception of their assistant principals who were ready to take on the challenge of being a principal. The process of self-identification of whether or not an assistant principal was ready to be a principal presented some discrepancies, meaning the assistant principal perceived a degree of readiness and the supervising mentor principal did not perceive readiness. Principal participants indicated a moderate degree of support of the assistant principal, despite their hesitancy or disagreement with their perception of readiness. Additionally, all principals described
pointed, difficult conversations with assistant principals with a more positive self perception as a means to support improvement.

While principal participants did not directly discuss their assistant principals who demonstrate readiness with mentoring success, coded data aligned these two themes following the interviews. In short, if the principal participant noted that their assistant principal was ready for the role, they also included this assistant principal as a mentee with whom they demonstrated success with mentoring and coaching. The value of learning through mentoring was evident in the data, and all principal participants discussed the emphasis placed on demonstrating the ability to learn and “coachability” as foundational to successful mentoring and a mindset necessary to assume the complexities of a principal role. Principal C summarized her successful mentoring experiences with her assistant principals who have either moved into a principal role or demonstrate readiness to do as such:

I believe that anyone who wants to learn, has the desire to learn, puts forth the effort to move towards that goal, and receives feedback can learn. But what I have learned is that not everybody has all of those aspects. And I do think that it takes all of those aspects.

The literature cautions organizations that time is a significant limitation of mentoring and oftentimes an additional responsibility of a supervisor (Bloom, 2005); however, in this study, this was not indicative of being a barrier when ambition and a desire to learn are evident in the aspiring principal.

**Actionable mentoring.** While the literature and participants defined mentors as someone who is a supportive “guide on the side” who is available to “show you the ropes
and the do’s and don’ts of school leadership.” The theme of establishing professional, growth-based goals was significant in the findings. All principals align their assistant principals’ required annual Professional Growth and Development Plan goals in a twofold manner: (1) To support the vision and mission of the school community and (2) To support and monitor their individual goals that are designed to prepare them for a principalship. For example, the principals engage in collaboration with their assistant principals to determine their area of need (i.e., family engagement, budget and fiscal planning, implementation of policy and procedure, enhancing the professional development program of the school) and subsequently develop their monitored goals. This process structures agreed upon identified areas of growth that are intended to influence their trajectory. Principal E attested to his monitoring process through his definition of mentoring:

A mentor is someone who builds a relationship with someone, with the intention of assisting them in development, whether it be through listening, to guiding and prompting them, to keeping them on track with things they either need to accomplish or say they want to accomplish, correcting in a way that is both helpful and encouraging.

Assistant Principal C confirmed the notion through his definition of mentoring that is accomplished through a goals-based approach:

A mentor is someone that is going to guide you into whatever goals you have set or whatever goals they have set for you. Somebody that is going to be transparent, that’s going to give you feedback, whether it’s good or bad, help you learn, and how to move forward.
While synthesizing the data into themes, participants indirectly connected mentoring to a process of learning that is guided by goals that are designed with specific outcomes in mind. Self perceived as “lifelong learners,” all participants referenced being able to learn and take knowledge from multiple sources and immersing themselves in a learning process. This perception has guided them to formulate specific, individual goals with the understanding that mentoring is intended to support and provide accountability towards their goals. Satisfaction was evident in each participant when they were able to learn.

**Mentors as servant leaders**

Greenleaf (1977) defined servant leadership as an “inward lifelong journey” where one’s characteristics are more about “doing and being” as opposed to subscribing to specific management techniques. He goes on to describe the inward journey as “the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first” (p. 7). Spears (1994, 2004) was able to derive ten characteristics of servant leaders from Greenleaf’s leadership writing to include: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, philosophy, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Greenleaf described the best test of servant leadership as:

> Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being serviced, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (p. 27).

While no participant specifically described their desire to mentor according to Greenleaf’s (1077) definition, a parallel theme of mentor attributes and servant leadership was evident in the data.
For instance, Principal B stated “trust, love, care, honesty, integrity are foundational” and went on to discuss the personal and professional satisfaction of mentoring by stating, “I think I get the most out of it, just satisfaction of service to someone where you can be there to let them know that they’re going to make it, they’re going to get through this.” Assistant Principal B described an ideal mentor as someone who is a “beacon or guide that does not dictate the way but uses their values to influence you.” Principal C noted the qualities of empathy, compassion, patience, humility, a willingness to share, and time to devote to the development of others as priorities of a mentor’s personal character. Empathy and “slowness to judge” were characteristics either directly mentioned or inferred with all participants in the study, and overwhelmingly, these attributes were referenced in conjunction with developing and sustaining a partnership built on trust. Principal B’s statement on his desire to serve and build capacity appropriately summarizes all principal participants' desire to serve stating, “most of us got to these positions because we want to help people.”

**Building relationships.** “Good mentors have to develop positive relationships and it ‘can't be all professional.’ Oftentimes, you have to get through the superficial to get to know the person” is how Principal A described her desire to know the other individual in the partnership. She went on to state that in order to provide affirmation, reciprocate trust, and develop trust, it is important for both parties to get to know each other on a personal level. Assistant Principal D stated that in order for someone to mentor or support his professional trajectory they need to “peel back the layers” of him as an individual. All participants described the identification and acknowledgement of the complexities, values, and beliefs of the individuals in the mentoring partnership in a
sincere and genuine manner were the underpinnings of building relational capacity. A positive relationship also allows the mentor to be able to understand “what works for you might not work for them,” as stated by Principal D. Principal E described a mentoring relationship in a nonprofessional or educational setting as beneficial because the mentor was able to develop a relationship that originated due to commonalities in race and gender. He described the relationship that began as a result of an invitation to “come by the office, and he [mentor] meant that.” This experience was influential in his definition of mentoring which was “a mentor is someone who builds a relationship with someone with the intention of assisting them in development.”

Assistant Principal C discussed knowing and understanding the other person’s values and philosophical beliefs on how to influence and develop someone. A former secondary English teacher, he described a successful mentorship “that was less about Dickens and Shakespeare and more about the art and science of teaching and developing relationships with students.” He also noted that he believes in the “opposites attract” idea that even though a mentor and mentee can be different in personalities and experiences, they share in qualities of “engagement, investment, and interest” in each other as individuals aspiring to grow as educators and leaders.

Trust was a construct introduced into the servant leadership attributes by all participants. In a correlational study between servant leadership and trust, the trust of a leader was defined as the level of confidence in the leader acting in a “fair, ethical, and predictable manner” (Joseph & Winston, 2004, p. 7). The presence of trust in a mentoring relationship was overwhelmingly evident in the data analysis process. While not explicitly communicated by all participants, there were mentoring experiences that
were shared that linked bidirectional trust and a positive mentoring relationship.

Tschannen-Moran (1998) posited that trust, a multidimensional construct, is sustained through communication and support on the part of the leader. Principal D summarized the trust building process to be able to understand a mentoring partner on a personal and professional level to be able to shift an open and honest conversation. She described through conversations differentiated between a “Mrs. Principal D and Dr. Superintendent conversation versus a ‘first name basis to a first name basis’ conversation.” These conversations have a level of trust and authenticity that broke down barriers of a supervisory position to engage in an open conversation built on trust.

Principal A described the assistant principals that were in place when she moved into her current role and the lack of trust and confidence in their relationships, as well as the assistant principals’ skills and work ethics. In retrospect, she now has a current assistant principal with whom she “became very close very quickly.” This current assistant principal is an African-American female with a desire to become a principal, and Principal A detailed their relationship as one built on trust and confidence. Principal A and her assistant principal have conversations around more difficult issues to include race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, and Principal A was told by her assistant principal that she was “too nice” and needed to be more firm and consistent. Because of the amount of trust in their relationship, this degree of feedback from a subordinate was received by Principal A in a professional manner that prompted behavioral change. This data was an example of Browning’s (2017) description of reverse mentoring, in that the mentor was exposed to innovative thinking that prompted reflection and subsequent change in practice (Murphy, 2012; Greengard, 2002).
Assistant Principal E described the level of trust in her relationship with her current Principal that began at the inception of their school leadership partnership. Prior to the beginning of her current principal’s tenure, Assistant Principal E was approached by her principal and asked to stay in her role at her school to assist with the new principal’s acclimation to the environment, since they shared similar experiences as African-American females. This finding counters what Kram (1985) states regarding the interactions between mentors and mentees who share similar identities and the intersectionality between race and gender. The pairing of an African-American female mentor with an African-American female mentee is underrepresented in the research, so this finding was a particularly salient finding in the data. Moreover, Assistant Principal E possessed a high degree of institutional knowledge, having been at the school for over 20 years. Her principal immediately worked to build a relationship with Assistant Principal E, who now describes their relationship as highly collaborative while also being autonomous. Assistant Principal D described the same principal as he and Assistant Principal E are in the same school. He noted that, “We all come to the table recognizing that the table is small to begin with. What we say here stays here, we can be honest, we can respectfully disagree and have discourse, with the understanding that we all want what’s best for our students.”

While many participants described trust built in an efficient manner, Assistant Principal A and Assistant Principal C described trusting relationships with their principals developed slowly over time. Assistant Principal A was not selected for the principal position in his current school, and someone else—the principal—was recommended for the role over him. This dynamic created initial tension in their
relationship; however, this was put aside for the sake of their school community. He noted that their personality differences and the degree of differences between his current principal and prior principals under whom he has served caused Assistant Principal A to adapt quickly. This adaptability and leveraging his current principal’s strengths as an instructional leader, allowed their professional relationship to grow into a reciprocally trusting partnership. Assistant Principal C arrived in his current role after having experienced a crisis in the removal of two administrators in his previous school of service. He described his current role as “not part of the original plan,” but reflects on “this was one of the best things that has happened to me.” Coming from an environment that was preparing for a complete leadership turnover, he was initially hesitant to trust the systems in place from the district. This hesitancy carried over into his current role and partnership with his current principal, despite him being selected by his current principal. Assistant Principal C described the slow, sustainable growth of their relationship, how much he has learned from his current principal, and his level of comfort in having difficult conversations in his current capacity.

Coaching and mentoring were terms that were used interchangeably throughout the data collection process. This was due in part to a number of the participants’ athletic background that they referenced in their experiences with successful mentoring. Many described a coach who possessed motivational skills who addressed specific areas of growth or technical skills. Positive, trusting relationships were paramount to both mentoring and coaching, according to the participants. The literature suggests numerous differences in coaching and mentoring to include: 1) Formal coaching versus informal mentoring, 2) Accountability through coaching, 3) Qualifications not linked to seniority
in or a supervisory role in coaching, and 4) Volunteering through mentoring versus being compensated for coaching (Bloom, 2005; Wilson, 2019). The common thread between mentoring and coaching in the study was the integration of psychosocial support for the mentee and how the mentor’s role can be a convergence of mentoring and coaching throughout the course of the mentoring relationship. This convergence could also provide a deeper understanding of the interchanged usage of the terms.

Despite the participants being from different racial backgrounds and working in different contexts, all participants noted a high degree of comfort and trust when discussing issues of race and equitable learning environments. With Social Equity being one of the four primary domains of the Schools to Watch framework (NFAMGR, 2019), discussions about equity and access for all learners is at the forefront of their school visions and daily practices. The participants believe that their leadership establishes the vision for all students regardless of race and socioeconomic status. “Always willing to tackle the hard stuff” was how Principal C described her experience in leading an environment that is primarily Caucasian in demographics. Despite this, there is a clear focus on school discipline, over and underrepresentation of minority students in school programs, and the recruitment and retention of a racially diverse teaching staff. Principal E, an African-American male, is steeped in experience in Title I schools where he “would not accept anything less for the students based on their location.” It is evident by the quote that there is a level of understanding that has been developed through trust. Principal E weaved trust as a central idea in his responses throughout both interviews. When asked if he feels that his life experience as an African-American male has shaped
his leadership practice, he detailed how his leadership team’s level of trust, collaboration, and decision making:

Rarely do I start a statement with ‘Because I’m a Black male…’ They are very sensitive in looking into the 360 degree view in how decisions are made and how those decisions are communicated to others. Naturally, people are going to have different experiences when you put them in a room together, in addition to the fact that he has and does experience the world differently. We all have to be comfortable in voicing how we view the world.

*Attributes as a “vehicle” to share experiences.* “Being able to provide emotional support is 110% more impactful than someone who is more technically driven,” said Principal C in response to whether or not attributes were more critical than credentials or experiences of a principal mentor. Table 4.8 summarizes the responses from the participants to this question in the first semi-structured interview where they were asked about qualities, characteristics, experiences, and credentials a mentor needs to possess to be a successful mentor. Active listener, supportive, reflective, encouraging, well-rounded, and trustworthy were many of the adjectives used to describe the ideal mentor to support them as they aspire to be a principal. The evidence into the relationship being the dominant factor in mentor was substantial throughout the study.

Throughout the interview, successful mentoring experiences were defined by those who had positive relationships with their mentee, and unsuccessful mentoring experiences were typically described as those with a negative relationship or by complete absence. However, Principal E reflected upon an experience and provided a salient example of how a traditionally defined positive relationship may or may not impact the
outcomes of mentoring. His reflection provides additional insight into how the relationship may or may not define success, as well as how the mentoring relationship could be compromised.

I will really say if there are regrets...seeing something happen to somebody and wondering what is that you could have done differently, what it was that you didn’t say, what it was that you didn’t do. I think unsuccessful mentoring may happen when the mentor doesn’t press beyond their own personal comfort zone to inject themselves into a place where maybe it’s not comfortable. If the other person doesn’t like you right away, but they’re better because of you, the question is, was that successful or unsuccessful? Well, it depends on what your goal was, right? The other person is better. I mean, they may never talk to me again, but they knew that how I was trying to lead or support them was right.

While reflecting on this quote, the attributes of openness and a skillset that is grounded in how to provide direct, authentic feedback marries trustworthiness for a successful formula for mentoring. Additionally, this quote brings into question how success is operationally defined in a mentoring relationship. To Principal E, the success of mentoring is outcomes based and can be measured by the capacity to learn and think differently. Credentials, years of experience, and specific experiences were limited in the data collection process. For example, two assistant principal participants referenced understanding how to allocate resources in the budget; however, they noted that they simply needed experience and practice as opposed to support or ongoing professional development. Principals A and D noted that it was important for the principal mentor to have experienced some “bumps and bruises,” but did not outline specific skills,
credentials, or areas of expertise. Aside from these brief mentions in the data, the overwhelming significance of the attributes included in Greenleaf’s servant leadership theory (1977) of listening, empathy, foresight, and the commitment to the growth of people.

Table 4.3 provides a visual representation of the convergence of the participants’ perceptions of the attributes and skills that demonstrate readiness to be a mentor. The left column summarizes what attributes the assistant principal participants indicated lead to successful mentoring, and this converges with what the principal participants indicated they do to provide support to aspiring principals. These attributes and skills are organized into basic categories under the theme of servant leadership attributes.
Table 4.3

Convergence of perceptions of attributes and skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successful principal mentors are able to… (Assistant Principal Participants)</th>
<th>I provide mentoring to aspiring principals by… (Principal Participants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convergence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Build Relationships</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Balance their personality with that of their mentee.</td>
<td>• Being reflective, humanistic, slow to judge and speak, truly embodying “what works for you might not work for them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Demonstrate that they are able to “leave things better than the way they found them.”</td>
<td>• Understanding that “trust, love, care, honesty, and integrity” are foundational.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify the needs of the mentee and be able to honor those needs.</td>
<td>• Provide emotional support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop a relationship with someone and genuinely invest in helping that person reach their maximum potential.</td>
<td>• Extends empathy, compassion, humility, a willingness to share, and time to devote to the development of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provide Feedback</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frame feedback as to not “crush your soul.”</td>
<td>• Communicating openly and honestly, provide encouragement, and be adaptable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Be a good coach and tell someone the hard stuff while keeping the relationship positive.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborate</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work with all types of people</td>
<td>• Transferring the ability to develop a positive school culture into developing an individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Willingly reciprocate ideas, possess an openness, and be open to learning from a mentee.</td>
<td>• Being highly reflective in nature and asking thought provoking questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be trustworthy and supportive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provide Relevant Experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide perspective of the functions of the school.</td>
<td>• Providing relevant, real-life opportunities to practice leadership skills with detailed follow-up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relinquish control in a situation, “they may know everything, but they don’t need to control everything.”</td>
<td>• Helping someone navigate the context of the system for their own personal development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be a well-rounded problem solver who is able to be emulated.</td>
<td>• Leverage credibility and experiences in job-alike scenarios.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Empowering mentees to think critically on how to solve a problem or develop a plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barriers that interfere with mentoring attributes

Barriers presented in the literature include marginal (Ragins & Scandura, 1997) dysfunctional mentoring (Williams et al, 2001; Kram 1985), gender and race limitations (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Blake-Bell et al., 2006), and time commitment (Bloom, 2005). Time commitment seemed to be a barrier that was not explicitly mentioned; however, it was referenced in the servant leadership theme as a means of being unable to invest in an aspiring principal. Although not directly mentioned as a barrier, individual mentoring (Kram, 1985) was the primary format for mentoring, and this did not deviate in the data.

In this study, two barriers emerged that were not evident in the literature and include the degree to which principals have the autonomy to select their assistant principals and the limitations of the size of the school districts, with regards to access, funding, and opportunities for promotion.

Degree of autonomy in assistant principal selection. Ryan and Deci (2000) defined autonomy as a person’s intersection of willingness to engage in a complex activity with their sense of self. In research across multiple fields, personal learning was the outcome of the individual's social context or environment in combination with their personality or “autonomy orientation” (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Liu & Fu, 2011, p. 1,195). In this study the principals’ lack of autonomous selection of their assistant principals was noted as a primary barrier that negatively affected not only their relationship with their assistant principal, but also their ability to mentor their assistant principal as an aspiring principal. In other words, all five principals noted difficulty with the assistant principals that they “inherited” from previous principals in their schools. The practice of inheriting assistant principals was negatively impactful in the mentoring relationship shifting from
transactional to transformational (Bass, 1998; Johnson et al., 2014b) and limited a culture of empowerment, openness, and innovation.

Principal A came into her current role with two assistant principals who were eligible for retirement, along with an instructional coach and magnet coordinator who were supportive of her but lacked innovation and adaptability. In a situation where Principal A was tasked with change agency, the lack of cohesiveness in the team due to her inability to select her team lessened the degree to which change occurred under her initial years of leadership. Principal A was able to contrast her initial leadership scenario with her current assistant principals who she was able to select. She has a positive relationship where trust, support, and professional learning are core values.

Principal C described two assistant principals that she inherited from the beginning of her role, in addition to one that was “gifted” as she had gained experience. Principal C described both individuals as plateauing in their current roles, despite her support and encouragement. As the researcher, I inferred that this frustrated Principal C as she seemed to describe more successful relationships with assistant principals that were selected as individuals who were able to “know the vision and make a decision.” She quoted a former assistant principal of whom she selected as saying, “Principal C, you’re coaching and teaching, and you don’t even know it. You’re just walking along and you’re dropping these little pearls of wisdom everywhere you go. I’ve kept a little, black book, and I’ve written them all down. I’d love to share them with you one day.” This particular scenario was an example of principal mentoring that was unintentional, yet an impactful form of job-embedded support provided by Principal C. This
unintentional mentoring in a supervisory mentoring capacity positioned her former assistant principal to assume a principalship.

Consistent with the experiences of Principals A and C, Principal D also noted considerable differences between the assistant principals that were in place when she moved into the principalship when compared with her current assistant principals. While these principals are consistent in their perceptions of their initial assistant principals, Principal D was promoted to her current role from an assistant principal in the same school. In other words, she became the supervisor of her former peers. Principal D noted “growing pains” of moving into a role “where she was no longer one of them,” and experienced a lack of trust and confidence from her assistant principals. She also noted a unique district practice in that the Superintendent will allow the assistant principals who will be in a situation where a peer is promoted to principal the opportunity to seek out other administrative roles in the district. Despite this, all of the assistant principals remained but eventually transitioned into other roles outside of the district. Principal D described her current assistant principals of whom she was able to select as a group with a “high degree of trust, have a willingness to ‘buy in’ to the vision, hard workers, and collaborative workers.”

**Size of district (i.e., Exposure/access and opportunities for promotion).** In recruiting participants for the study, the primary goal was to achieve representation from varying sizes of school districts, community settings (e.g., rural, suburban, and urban), school sizes, gender and race, and school leadership experiences. A theme that emerged during the interview process regarding professional development, mentor training, and likelihood to pursue a principalship was the influence of the size of the district. The four
barriers that emerged based on the size of the district include: (1) Exposure to different leaders and leadership styles, (2) Importance of access to outside, supplementary professional development and networking resources, (3) Geographic size of the district, and (4) Opportunities to promote within the participants’ current district.

All five principal participants referenced prior principals under whom they served as teachers, instructional coaches, or assistant principals. Their level of exposure based on mentoring experience and size of their district have fundamentally shaped their approach to how they mentor aspiring principals. Because of their experiences in larger districts or mobility between districts, their exposure has influenced the exposure that they provide. The principal participants consistently referenced the school leaders that had an impact on them as individuals and how their service under their leadership has longitudinally inspired their current practice. Principal C described one of her district’s former (now retired) Superintendents who shared transparent stories that provided wisdom at the end of monthly administrator meetings. Humorously named “Uncle Gary’s Stories,” these snapshots of relevant scenarios shared with school leaders was impactful to Principal C and allowed her to gain perspective and insight from a senior level position, as well as an individual who possessed a wealth of knowledge in multiple district contexts. Principal D described her relationship with a former assistant superintendent as one of her most impactful influences on her professional trajectory. Despite this district level leader moving out of the district three years ago, Principal D still remains in contact and relishes in communicating her personal success and the celebrations of the school to him. While these instances do not directly support a barrier, it can be inferred that the limitation of access in a smaller district or rural setting where
exposure or vast perspectives are limited can be negatively influential for aspiring principals.

Three of the five assistant principal participants referenced their experiences with prior supervising principals, and the varying strengths of their supervising principals have provided robust learning opportunities for the participants. Assistant Principal A contrasted his two supervising principals in his current middle school as “night and day different.” The strengths of his first principal included logistics and conflict deescalation; whereas, his current principal’s strengths are instructional leadership and direct impact on teaching and learning. Assistant Principal C differentiated his experiences with his supervising principals in multiple manners to include school level (i.e., high school versus middle school) and gender (i.e., male versus female). His male supervising principals served at the high school level and were detailed as being “logistics guys.” Assistant Principal C’s current female principal is more adept at building relationships and collaborating with teachers.

Principals C and D, as well as Assistant Principals A, D, and E all referenced the professional development received outside of their district. All examples of out of district leadership development were funded by their employing districts. For example, all principal participants attended the Principals Induction Program (PIP) that is required for induction principals in South Carolina and is facilitated by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE). This required program focuses on resiliency in leadership, networking, gaining a better understanding of the PADEPP evaluation system, and group style mentoring where induction principals are grouped by geographic location and assigned a mentor principal. The SCDE also sponsors the Developing
Aspiring Principals Program (DAPP) and the Building Instructional Capacity (BIC) program for aspiring principals, and four of the five assistant principal participants have experienced these opportunities. These voluntary programs for assistant principals provide leadership exposure and networking but do not assign the aspiring principal an experienced mentor. The same four assistant principals have been through all three levels of the South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA) Center for Executive Educational Leadership (CEEL) program for assistant principals. In the first level of the program (Silver Strand), CEEL participants are focused on the day-to-day objectives of enhancing proficiency in the role of an assistant principal. Through the document analysis, there is a shift in the program objectives for assistant principals as they transition from the introductory Silver Strand to the advanced levels of programming. The Gold Strand provides insight into growth objectives for the individual to become a principal, and the Platinum strand provides individualized coaching and mentoring for the assistant principal from an outside, experienced mentor. SCASA was quoted as, “districts will be offered the opportunity to both refer assistant principals and make recommendations as to specific subject area content needed for particular individuals in order to enhance his or her leadership potential. Assessments will be administered and interpreted for identification of development needs (www.scasa.org).” The objective of this organization is to provide support to districts who may need support in the area of leadership development or who seek to provide external perspectives to their aspiring principals. While these opportunities have been made available and supported from the district level from the participants in this study, they all noted that accessibility of the outside resources was noted as a barrier due to fiscal constraints of
socioeconomically disadvantaged districts and/or districts that do not prioritize leadership development.

The Davidson School District, which is the largest school district in the sample, was the only district in the sample who has developed an internal mentoring framework in conjunction with a partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership at the University of Washington. This framework included an objective, stating,

“The purpose of the Principal Mentor Program is to provide supportive and reflective mentors who support new principals to become confident, competent, and courageous in the service of student equity, support, and growth. The most critical task of an effective principal mentor is to get to know their mentee well. Support and guidance provided must generate from the needs of the mentee in the context of the work of school leadership. Davidson Principal Mentors develop and use coaching skills as they mentor the novice principals.”

In this framework, there are six tasks that Davidson indicates as necessary to principal support: (1) Supports the principal as an instructional leader, (2) Advocates for student-centered decision making at all levels of the organization, (3) Navigates the organizational structure and systems, (4) Models self awareness through self reflection, and (5) Guides and advises, and (6) Cultivates a positive school culture through shared leadership. In addition to these tasks, there are dispositions including being growth oriented, systems focused, demonstrating strong instructional leadership, communicator, collaborative, organized, reflective and open minded, ethical, and equity focused. Through the document analysis, there is an overlap in the tasks and dispositions presented in this mentoring framework and the attributes of servant leaders.
The districts represented in the sample range from 2,000 students to 75,000 (SCDE, 2021) and are located in rural, suburban, and urban areas. Principals A and B are employed in the Davidson School District, which is the largest school district in the sample. Both participants discussed the barrier of geographic location on in person mentoring in their experiences with driving distance to reach their mentee, as well as the contextual differences in the school communities due to the vastness of the square mileage of the school district. Aside from this barrier, both principals highlighted the funding resources available in their larger distance as they discussed their opportunities for professional development and an executive level district leader whose sole responsibility is to provide district wide leadership development. This barrier was particularly impactful for assistant principals from smaller districts, as it was a limitation for access and exposure. Assistant Principal A is employed in the smallest school district in the sample, which is in a rural community. He discussed the limitations of a smaller school district with regards to resources and staffing to facilitate and support leadership development and the inability to collaborate with larger, neighboring districts with resources. While the district and school level leaders in the smaller district have a “family feel,” this limits their ability to provide exposure to their school level leaders and those who aspire to be principals to external leadership development opportunities.

Outlook for promotion and the potential to move within the district’s leadership ranks was a barrier that Assistant Principal C perceived as negatively impacting leadership development and mentoring experiences. In his current district of 8,500 students, assistant principal and principal vacancies are rare due to the stability of the school level leadership in the district. While stability is a key advantage of school
improvement, it is perceived as discouraging by this participant who feels he may have to seek options outside of his current district in order to be promoted. Assistant Principal C described himself as “fiercely loyal”; however, he did demonstrate an understanding of the potential for a future need to move out of district, which places reservation on his mentoring relationship with his principal. All participants from larger districts described the fluidity of movement within their district with promotions and reassignments, where the capacity of assistant principals is paramount in filling a higher volume of principal vacancies.

**Theoretical Discussion**

This research study was conducted through the lenses of two theoretical frameworks. The first theory utilized was Mezirow’s Transformative Learning theory (1985) that supports learning and the shaping of beliefs through critical reflection. Bandura’s Social Cognitive theory (1977, 1986) provides guidance for learning through direct experience, opportunities for observation, and modeling. Knowledge gained from these direct experiences are influential to the learner’s behavior, and the behavior is consistently shaped by positive and negative reinforcements (Bandura, 1977).

**Transformative learning theory**

The ability to think critically and self-reflect were two attributes that transcended all participants’ prior successful experiences with mentoring, as well as attributes that they desired in a mentor. Critical thinking and self-reflection, the hallmarks of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning theory (1985), morphed into three learning schemes: (1) Learning within meaning schemes, (2) Learning new meaning schemes, and (3) Learning through meaning transformation (Kitchenham, 2008).
Learning meaning within schemes. Learning meaning within schemes works with the learner's present meaning “by expanding upon, contemplating, and revising their present systems of knowledge (p. 111)” Kitchenham’s (2008) adaptation of Mezirow’s theory was evident in the integration of knowledge for the assistant principals. Each of the participants was able to pinpoint examples of opportunities that they have been given to gain perspective through their mentorship experiences with multiple principals. This was evident in scenarios where they had initial knowledge of a process or solution but arrived at a different conclusion. For example, what might present as a simplistic problem is often layered with complexities, hidden unintended consequences, and unanticipated outcomes if new meaning is not gained through the expansion of their previous knowledge.

The principal participants in the study supported this learning as they detailed their transition from assistant principal to principal where they were able to gain a broader perspective of the school as a part of a larger organization or a complex problem and the accompanying symptoms. “It will make more sense as a whole once you get into things,” was how Principal C described her approach to mentoring an assistant principal through a potential problem analysis. The principals’ abilities to integrate knowledge of how systems work in tandem and not isolation seemed to be an advantage of their experience.

Learning a new meaning scheme. Learning a new meaning scheme takes place when a learner “acquires a new set of meaning schemes within the learner’s meaning perspective” (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 111). In other words, they utilize their foundational knowledge to capture and integrate new knowledge. Assistant principals discussed their
apprehension in school budgeting and finance. As evidenced from the focuses of mentoring described above, little was focused on the technical aspects of the role. While the principals understand that the broad scope of school finance encompasses many roles and responsibilities to include ethical behavior, understanding state and federal procurement laws, the deposit, withdrawal, and transfer of funds, key differences in local, state, and federal funds, how to allocate funds for prioritized needs, responsiveness to a budget crisis, and “the red tape” for funding sources, they neglected this as a focal point in a mentoring partnership. Instead, they prioritized the humanistic factor of education with a vision of student learning pivoting on adult learning as opposed to policy driven leadership domains that may require less creativity or innovation.

All assistant principals in the study confirmed that they are indeed involved in the instructional planning for their schools to include the professional development plan, areas of improvement, integration of technology or other instructional strategies, and three of the five assistant principals entered their role as former instructional coaches. Despite entering their leadership roles with a strong instructional background, an area of support identified by the principals in the study is the understanding of the accountability system and the responsibility that comes with state and federal accountability measures. This new meaning scheme within instructional leadership was identified as an area of need for aspiring principals, thus an area for principals to support through mentoring.

*Learning through meaning transformation.* Learning through meaning transformation occurs when a learner “encounters a problem that cannot be resolved through present meaning schemes, so the resolution comes through a redefinition of the problem.” (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 112). All participants gave examples of a crisis or
obstacle that they have encountered in their professional capacity and the outreach that ensued, in order to do any or all of the following: (1) Recruit a “devil’s advocate” to challenge their thinking, (2) Elicit support in navigating an unfamiliar system or situation, (3) Needing psychosocial support through listening or “venting,” (4) Seeking confirmation on responsiveness in a crisis, (5) “Bouncing ideas off of someone,” or (6) Thinking futuristically and how to apply new methods of problem solving. The overlap in servant leadership attributes was also evident in crisis mentoring to include listening, empathy, trust, and foresight. These attributes transcended mentoring and were necessary for the complexities of all situations.

Kitchenham (2008) defined learning through meaning transformation when a learner “encounters a problem that cannot be resolved through present meaning schemes, so the resolution comes through a redefinition of the problem (p. 112).” Principal E discussed “The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimension,” a quote credited to Oliver Wendell Holmes in his interview. He used this quote to describe his perceptions of how others learn from him, specifically through their most recent restructuring of the school community. The openness and level of authenticity used to describe how he supports his current assistant principals and how he reciprocates learning with them is captured in this quote. Learning transforms when a problem is redefined, and the overwhelming majority of the participants gave specific examples of how learning occurred through the redefining of a problem with a mentor.

Assistant Principal C detailed a crisis situation that he experienced in a different environment, and how the support and mentoring he received from different angles allowed him to see a new perspective through a fresh start in middle level leadership. His
level of exposure to different leadership styles, how gender identity may influence leadership approaches, and the adaptability of leadership at different educational levels afforded him new opportunities to transform a crisis into “one of the best things that has happened to him professionally.” Through redefinition of a problem in the crisis, he was able to morph disappointment and setbacks into new ways of viewing school leadership and his overall trajectory.

While it is assumed that transformative learning occurs in the mentee, principal participants who typically serve in mentor roles indicated that they were able to develop a new meaning scheme through empowering their mentees to think critically and solve problems independently. To a degree, reverse mentoring (Browning, 2017; Greengard, 2002; Murphy 2012) emerged as a result of the principals analyzing their practices through critical reflection in mentoring. Principal A has slowly countered her natural intuition of being a “fixer.” She spoke at length about what is considered a strength of a principal, which is to possess a high degree of motivation and persistence in solving problems. Although counterintuitive to mentoring, Principal A described her personal transformation of empowering those under her to solve problems through their own mechanisms as a reciprocal benefit of mentoring.

**Social cognitive theory**

Bandura’s social cognitive theory assumes that perceived self-efficacy is a pivotal factor for human agency (1977, 1986). This theory was used in this study as a possible explanation of how successful principals in high performing middle grades schools engage in leadership behaviors that provide mentoring support to their assistant principals. Principals and assistant principals with positive mentoring experiences and
the ongoing relationships that were outcomes of the experience were more likely to pursue a more complex role, demonstrate higher degrees of efficacy in their current role, and feel more confident entering a principal role. Four constructs were devised to influence the social cognitive theory (1977): 1. Direct experience, 2. Observation, 3. Modeling, and 4. Self-regulatory processes. Allowing a learner direct experience, opportunities for observation, and modeling are critical to the success of mentoring. Learners utilize knowledge gained from direct experiences to drive their behavior, and positive and negative reinforcements shape their behavior.

**Direct experience.** Direct experience was a construct most commonly used as an intentional means of providing assistant principals with the experiences. For example, all principals give their assistant principals specific tasks that build in frequency, intensity, and level of independence. Aspects of the school budget, parts of the instructional programs, and opportunities to communicate with internal and external stakeholders were examples of tasks that were given to assistant principals as a means of them gaining direct experience in a safe environment that fosters learning. In the interviews, principals highlighted that these were the leadership areas or tasks that “they wish they had known going into their role,” which can allow us to infer that their personal experience drives how they provide these experiences to those working under them.

The assistant principals described all of these tasks and how they varied in their current context. “This is not simply a task that I don’t want to do or don’t know how to do, rather it is something that is of value for [assistant principals] to know to be ready to move on to other roles. These experiences are intentionally designed for them to grow,” is how Principal B creates experiential learning with attached explanations of relevance.
and feedback throughout the process. The assistant principals were highly appreciative of these learning experiences, but they all shared the commonality of appreciating a better understanding of how these tasks integrate into the larger context of school leadership and their relevance. Knowing how all of these areas fit together, the magnitude of the task, and the relevance of the work to their trajectory also yielded a higher degree of motivation and engagement for the assistant principals. SCASA’s CEEL program describes assistant principals as “individuals who bring a level of leadership experience but often lack the full skill set needed to move into a head principalship role.” This integral, statewide program seeks to support assistant principals in their direct experience as they link leadership to the necessary skill sets of being a principal.

**Observation.** Observation was described indirectly by all participants as a means of learning, where the participants were able to identify learning in real-life, relevant scenarios. Assistant principals were able to attach meaning to observation as a means of learning and preparation through depictions of situations where they observed their principal performing a task, handling a crisis, or planning. Observing as a means of learning was not an intentional mentoring task rather an opportunity to include assistant principals as witnesses or as a different perspective in a situation. This indirect means of inclusivity provided opportunities for the assistant principals to immerse themselves into a situation and reflect upon how they would respond or conduct themselves in a given scenario.

Principal C described this in her relationship with a former assistant principal who was constantly watching and learning. As they remain close colleagues, this former assistant principal will often respond when asked about a success as, “I learned this by
watching Principal C.” She went on to describe her personal theory of “more being caught than taught,” which highlights the impact of observation as a means of developing learning, self reflecting, being able to transfer that knowledge to future situations, and building efficacy as a result of learning.

**Modeling.** To a degree modeling was the construct that was least evident in the data. There was little to no mention of the intentional design of providing modeling for the purpose of learning. All participants leaned more towards observation as a strategy to gain meaning as opposed to intentional modeling. An argument could be made that modeling could occur intentionally or unintentionally. Regardless of the initial intent, utilizing scenario-based examples of how to approach a situation, variables to consider, and processes used to make decisions could be mutually beneficial to both parties, according to the principal participants. As they transitioned into their second interview, this was an area of emphasis in which the principal participants felt could be more impactful to learning. Principal D makes herself available in a collaborative space to simply talk through decision-making as a form of modeling, and said, “Often times we find ourselves caught up in the hustle and bustle of things and fail to stop and recognize that there are very teachable moments for those under us if we recognize and use them for gain.”

**Self-regulatory processes.** Self-regulation spoke highly to the monitoring of growth over time and desired outcomes of both the mentee and mentor. As Baumeister and Vohs (2004) suggest in their theoretical framework of self-regulation, which broadly refers to goal-directed behaviors in terms of people “regulating their thoughts, emotions, impulses or appetites, and task performances” (p. 2). Bandura’s theory of self efficacy
compliments (1977, 1986, 1997) the theory of being able to regulate internal factors to reflect the belief or confidence in one’s abilities to internally motivate and self lead.

The principal participants in the study were examples of blurring the lines between their roles and that of the assistant principals by creating environments that value collaboration and inclusivity. These environments are built on trust that is developed within a partnership or leadership team. This takeaway is evident in the emergent themes of the attributes of servant leadership and hinged upon the trajectory of the assistant principal. This means that trust and a willingness to learn that influences the urgency based on trajectory yields an environment that fosters mentoring. This understanding is tangential to the research primarily due to the environment or conditions in which mentoring takes place.

Principal C, Principal E, and data collected through the analyses of district and state level documents of the DAPP, APPLE, and BIC programs can be summarized in the quote by Principal C, “The objective of mentoring is to make them principal ready and not just a better assistant principal. I want them to be able to step into my role when I’m ready to move on.” With this being the goal of principal mentoring, the principals are self-regulating their behaviors to allow for the empowerment of their assistant principals. Principal A, despite her desire for efficiency, noted a more intentional focus in empowering her assistant principals to practice developing behavior through experience,

I know the answer, and I want you to know the answer. I’m here to help you get to the answer, so it is truly how you want to handle it. What do you want to do in this situation?
This mentoring practice converges with Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd’s (1991) embedding of critical reflective opportunities in the mentoring process. Additionally, the behavior modification, enhancement, and regulation of the assistant principals was evident in the data through the participants indicating their areas of growth, where they need to assert themselves, or where they need to withdraw in a situation. Being able to strike a balance in direct and indirect leadership was the area in which principals indicated areas of growth in their current assistant principals, as well as the assistant principals in the study. Being able to gain experience and subsequent wisdom through practice in a safer, less accountable role was what principals ideally desired when they were learning. Evidence supports them utilizing Mezirow’s (1977, 1986) first three constructs of the social cognitive theory to develop self-regulation, thus leading to a stronger degree of leadership efficacy.

**Summary of Chapter**

Data collection in this study through semi-structured interviews, a document analysis of district and state level mentoring documents, and a questionnaire to gather data on each participants’ background provide foundational evidence for the emergence of four primary themes to include: (1) Mentors as servant leaders, (2) Barriers that mask mentoring attributes, (3) Goals-based trajectory mentoring, and (4) Leverage mentor attributes over experience. The theoretical frameworks through which these data were analyzed suggest that professional learning should focus on transformations and being able to think in new ways, in conjunction with how adults learn through active involvement.
The importance of not only job-embedded support for assistant principals who aspire to be principals but the active engagement of principals as mentors is evident now more than ever. In a growing deficit of adequately prepared school leaders, practical and relevant experience that is provided in an environment that values relational capacity presents a high degree of need for schools, school districts, and states (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The intensity sample in this study collected from high performing middle grades schools provides insights into these leaders' beliefs about adult learning and how that is influential to student learning, as well as ownership in supporting a systems view of how school leadership should function. Their abilities to collaborate and self-reflect provide a model that influences the body of knowledge, as well as me as a researcher and practitioner.

Chapter 5 will further connect the data collection to the research questions. Additionally, study implications, policy recommendations, and considerations for future research will be addressed.
CHAPTER 5:
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this qualitative interview study, middle level principals and assistant principals were interviewed in conjunction with a document analysis to explore the attributes and skills that determine readiness for the principals to mentor aspiring principals. In Chapter 1, the research statement, purpose, and rationale detailed the gaps in the literature surrounding principal preparation, mentoring, and mentoring readiness. Mezirow’s Transformative Learning theory (1985) and Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive theory provide the theoretical lenses through which the study was conducted. Chapter 2 seeks to provide an overview of the literature that focuses on mentoring to include: (1) Defining mentoring, (2) Mertz’s (2004) conceptual framework of mentoring, and (3) Barriers to mentoring. Chapter 2 also provides a segway into the skills and attributes needed for mentoring, as well as behaviors, responsibilities, and leadership practices of high performing leaders. Methodology of the study to include research design, data collection and analysis, and thematic development are outlined in Chapter 3. Data sources in the study included an initial questionnaire, two semi-structured interviews for each of the ten participants, and a document analysis from available district and state level documents. Chapter 4 discusses the findings and thematic development of the data collected in the study through my interpretation as the researcher. In this chapter, I provide further
explanation on how the findings of this study seek to answer the research questions. I offer recommendations that stem from the data related to the research field of mentoring in educational leadership spaces, needs for future research, and policy recommendations for state education agencies and policymakers.

**Research Questions**

In an effort to explain the skills and attributes of inservice principals and their readiness for mentoring, the following research questions were used to guide the study:

Research Question 1. What type of attributes are evident in principals who demonstrate readiness for mentoring aspiring principals?

Subquestion 1. What attributes are identified as common strengths and areas of growth for principals to demonstrate readiness for mentoring?

Research Question 2. How do self perceptions of principal readiness for mentoring compare to the perceptions of their mentee assistant principals?

All data collection, specifically the interview protocol for principals and assistant principals, were guided by the research questions. Research Question 1 sought to understand the attributes or principals who have demonstrated success as mentors, as well as more commonly identified strengths and areas of growth for mentor principals. Research Question 2 sought to align perceptions of the participant groups. For example, did what the principals perceive as readiness for mentoring align with the needs and perceptions of readiness of that of the assistant principals.

Research Question 1. What type of attributes are evident in principals who demonstrate readiness for mentoring aspiring principals?

Subquestion 1. What attributes are identified as common strengths and areas of growth for principals to demonstrate readiness for mentoring?

Data suggest that attributes of principals who demonstrate readiness to mentor include characteristics of servant leaders. Greenleaf (1977) included trust, love, care,
compassion, empathy, patience, a willingness to share and collaborate, and a desire to grow others as characteristics of a servant leader, and these were the qualities most commonly found in this theme. Principals who are ready to mentor are able to build relationships with their mentees that captures both their personal and professional essence. These relationships are built on trust to include: (1) Open, honest communication, (2) The receipt of feedback to change behavior, (3) A willingness to dialogue and make change in the face of inequities, and (4) An understanding of how to guide a personalized, professional path. The professional pathway was designed when the mentee possessed a clear vision of their professional trajectory, and the mentor was able to support, encourage, and plan through backwards design to influence this pathway.

Subquestion 1 guided the most common strengths which included those of servant leadership, open and honest communication, and time. Participants typically described strengths of mentors as such and the areas of growth as the absence of servant leadership attributes, open and honest communication, and time. Participants spoke in depth and consistently about specific examples of successful mentoring opportunities, which included trust, compassion, empathy, communication, and the relational capacity as a result of these attributes. The quality of time spent with a mentee was critical in their perception and influenced the richness of the experience and the longevity of the relationship. For example, all participants were able to share an example of how they built friendships or at the very least stayed in contact with their mentoring partner.

Areas of growth identified in this subquestion include being able to use the relationship to “dig deeper” into support mechanisms during a crisis or problem, which may lead to lack of intervention or regret in a situational experience. Time was the
primary barrier to readiness. Regardless of the amount and depth of experience, lack of time as defined by the schedule of the mentor or mentoring being a priority of the mentor was the primary area of growth for developing aspiring principals. I can infer from the literature that lack of time is impactful to the cultivation stage where the mentor and mentor are establishing a degree of psychosocial support and methods of knowledge transfer (American Psychological Association, 2006) where relational capacity emerges as a foundational aspect of mentoring. Lack of time is also counterproductive to the accountability of meeting mentoring goals (Gray et al., 2007). Accountability established in mentoring (Francis, 2020) in conjunction with relational capacity was evident in the perceived successful experiences. Additionally, the most successful mentoring experiences occurred when the mentor was able to integrate mentoring into the scope of their role through a strategic, intentional, and inclusive approach of their assistant principal or mentee. Integration and the relevance achieved through job-embedded mentoring not only seemed to be successful but was used as means to counter the barrier of time spent on mentoring as an isolated practice. In addition to this, valuing the opportunities for critical reflection and building those into mentoring relationships was an area of growth for principals to consider.

Research Question 2. How do self perceptions of principal readiness for mentoring compare to the perceptions of their mentee assistant principals?

The self perceptions of principals regarding their readiness for mentoring were more aligned to the technical skills that they have attained in their experience. Examples of these experiences included understanding how to allocate fiscal resources, the navigation of personnel issues, possessing a high degree of capacity with instructional programming, and the proven ability to manage crises. The “these are the things you
have to know” guided the principals’ objectives for mentoring with limited mention of how to convey knowledge of the technical skills. The building of relational capacity was secondary to the transfer of technical skill knowledge. The data from principal participants suggested that principals with these experiences and the willingness to invest time were most likely to demonstrate readiness. The understanding of servant leadership characteristics as a vehicle to learn and experience the needed technical skills was minimal in the data from principal participants.

Assistant principals’ perceptions focused on two primary readiness indicators: (1) Servant leadership characteristics and (2) A willingness to share and collaborate. While both groups of participants described themselves as learners, the willingness on behalf of the assistant principals to demonstrate a strong desire to learn was significant in the data. The reciprocal relationship of the principal’s willingness to share and collaborate with the assistant principal’s desire to learn yielded examples of successful mentoring partnerships that were mutually beneficial.

Mertz’s (2004) conceptual framework of mentoring supports the idea that psychosocial development is the primary consideration of a mentoring relationship and provides a progression into professional development and career advancement. Formatted as a pyramid, all components of teaching and knowledge transfer are contingent upon modeling in a supportive manner. The assistant principals’ perceptions were anchored in the building of relational capacity, which directly links to Mertz’s (2004) conceptual framework and Bandura’s (1977) self-regulatory processes and the increase of self efficacy in their leadership. In this study, the data collected from the principals suggest that their receiving of mentoring was deeply rooted in psychosocial
support and relational capacity; however their perception of mentoring readiness was influenced by a strong grasp of technical aspects. While this somewhat diverges from Mertz’s framework, it aligns directly to Bandura’s (1977) first three constructs of direct experience, modeling, and observation within the social cognitive theory. This perception of modeling or teaching technical skills is consistent with learning new meaning schemes in Mezirow’s transformative learning theory (1985).

**Limitations**

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explained that “limitations are consistent with the always partial state of knowing in social research, and elucidating limitations helps readers to know how they should read and interpret their work” (p. 147). In his 2016 work, Glesne defined limitations as “aspects that limited the research in some way but were beyond the researcher’s control or perceived only in hindsight (p. 214). Limitations are outlined in this chapter to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

First, my personal experience as a middle school principal in a School to Watch may contribute to a bias that could be influential in the study. My “insider” knowledge was a primary epistemological assumption, and in this case, my autobiographical knowledge allowed me insight into the roles and responsibilities of the participant school leaders. Remaining mindful of how my personal experiences could contribute to biases was critical to the trustworthiness of the study, and mindfulness of these potential biases was evident in the formulation of field notes and memos. All participants would make a statement with an ending of “you know” to imply that my personal experience was similar to that of their experiences with mentoring or holistic school leadership experiences. In response to their “you know” statements, I used follow-up questions in
the semi-structured interviews to unpack these assumptions, reduce the likelihood of potential comparison of experiences, and to ensure that the participants’ experiences were not overshadowed by my experiences. In order to not assume the nature and depth of their experiences, follow-up questions in both interviews and member checking of my inferences were necessary to avoid biases and assumptions.

Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic and disruptions as a result of the pandemic were a limitation of the study. The global pandemic was negatively influential in being able to attain district permission to conduct research with employees. I gleaned that districts were protective of their employees during the summer months of the study so as to not overwhelm them with research requests. Additionally, the in-district leadership shifts, promotions, and mobility due to the districts adapting to pandemic made the recruitment of participants and their availability difficult.

An unintended positive outcome of the pandemic was that participants were eager to engage with me as a school leader as they indicated their isolation from professional networking over the course of the 17 months prior to the study being conducted. As Gross (2009) discussed in his work on leadership turnover, isolation is a primary contributor to why principals leave their roles. The COVID-19 pandemic magnified this isolation, according to all participants. This was due in part to canceled networking opportunities, district visitor policies prohibiting in person meetings, and a significant workload that focused on safety standards and how to address student learning obstacles. Each participant indicated a high degree of satisfaction with participation in this study, stating their delight and cathartic state through their discussion of school leadership and aspiring school leaders. Many participants noted that their voices were seemingly
silenced as a result of pandemic leadership as their focus had shifted to meeting the basic safety needs of students and staff under their leadership. The interviews seemed to provide a temporary distraction from the stressors of school operations and leadership during a global pandemic.

All interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform, which created the barrier of being able to interact in a face to face fashion. However, the participants demonstrated a high level of comfort with integration of technology, since this had been a primary platform for meetings and professional development over the course of the pandemic. Additionally, the video recordings allowed me to not only listen to the interview multiple times but to also view the recordings, in order to make observations and inferences on any nonverbal cues or body language.

Third, the literature addresses leadership theory (i.e., servant and transformational leadership) primarily in an organizational context rather than a single individual to another single individual. How these two theories influence the preparation of a leader was limited. While the concept of mentoring is broad in all major career strands, the readiness of principals to mentor in the context of their day to day leadership practices was limited. An abundance of mentoring from the leader to teacher role was evident; however, the job-embedded nature of leadership mentoring and development is not explored in the literature.

**Research Implications and Recommendations**

Both participant groups in the study outlined five, primary areas that may provide guidance to districts who seek to invest time, fiscal resources, and restructuring to promote internal principal preparation. These strategies connected to mentoring concepts
to include the building of relational capacity through the autonomous assistant principal selection, actionable or needs-based mentoring based on the long term professional trajectory of the assistant principal, internal administrative role structuring, and the current size and location of the district that suggested limiting access to mentoring and exposure to different leadership styles. This study holds implications for future research in the areas of the degree to which principals have the autonomy to select their assistant principals, a measure of how an assistant principal’s trajectory influenced the development of their personal and professional goals to be supported through mentoring, internal structuring of building level leadership roles as a barrier or support for principal preparation, and how the size and/or geographic location of a district impacts the accessibility of mentors and mentoring opportunities.

While not an emergent theme, a deeper exploration into race and gender as a part of mentoring partnerships in a school leadership setting would be beneficial. Two participants in this study briefly touched on this topic in their discussion of attributes; however, it would be beneficial to collect data on how race and gender impact the success of a mentoring relationship in a school setting. For example, school districts may want to consider how race is impactful to mentoring partnerships in their district, despite a lack of depth in the literature (Blake & Bell, 2006). Additionally, diversifying gender may allow for a greater degree of exposure to differing practices, mindsets, and opportunities for growth, thus yielding more satisfaction with mentoring (Ragin & Cotton, 1999; Dreher & Cox, 1996).

The degree to which principals have the autonomy to select their assistant principals was a primary barrier that negatively impacted the relationship and mentoring
capacity between a principal and assistant principal. This was evidenced by all 
participants, regardless of their current role and the overwhelming indicator of positive 
relational capacity between the principal and assistant principal. For example, all 
principal participants differentiated between their mentoring and overall supervisory 
experiences with assistant principals that they were able to select versus those who were 
in place or transferred through in-district shifting. Likewise, the assistant principals 
noted differences in the relationships they had with principals who selected them versus 
those who “inherited” them. There was reciprocal evidence of commitment to leadership 
development when a principal directly influenced the selection of their assistant 
principal(s). Likewise, the assistant principals noted a high degree of commitment to the 
leader who had “taken a chance on them,” as quoted by Assistant Principal C. 
Participants recommended that where allowable, districts should consider the degree of 
autonomous selection at some point in their principal’s tenure to allow for the 
relationships to build with a foundation of commitment to development. To this end, 
future research could address the degree to which autonomous selection impacts the 
relationship between principals and assistant principals and how this influences 
mentoring and the trajectory of the assistant principal. This research could inform district 
level leaders’ practices on how school leaders are promoted and placed in the context of 
the district.

Actionable mentoring was summarized in the individualized needs and goals of 
an assistant principal who aspires to be a principal. Both participant groups noted 
success with mentoring in scenarios where the mentee aspired to be a principal. The 
sense of “what you get out of mentoring depends on what you put in,” as summarized by
Principal A was influenced by a desire to be ready to be a principal and not just a better assistant principal. Summarized as having a vision for what their trajectory would be, mentoring was described as most successful when the mentor was able to address specific needs, gaps in experience, and long term goals that have been clearly articulated by the assistant principal. It was evident in the data that a desire to become a principal prompted the development of actionable goals that guided the mentoring experience was integral to the short and long term effectiveness of the partnership and is something that was encouraged by the principal participants. Research conducted in a qualitative or quantitative methodology could provide further insight on how an assistant principal’s professional trajectory could be measured or correlated with their perceptions of mentoring. These data could provide a framework for how districts or states could develop mentoring plans with specific measures in place to provide individualized support for aspiring principals.

While not a robust theme presented in the data around mentoring, the internal structuring of school leadership responsibilities was a development barrier for the principalship. Participants who had previously served in high school settings or larger middle school settings, mentioned that they either wished that there had been intentional focus or had intentionally designed leadership structures to expose assistant principals to all areas of school leadership and management. For example, assistant principals who solely experienced instructional leadership, discipline, special education, or facilities management tended to lack a broad experience of all areas of the school’s programming. While the participants failed to link this to mentoring, exposure to opportunities outside of their specific role does provide greater opportunities for reflection, mentoring, and
preparation to assume a principal role that captures more broad leadership and management.

Mindfulness of the size and location of the district was a recommendation from participants from small and large districts. All participants discussed the limitations of both sizes of districts. Table 5.1 outlines the advantages and disadvantages of larger and smaller districts and how their size potentially impacts mentoring. Future research could address how the size and geographic location (i.e., rural, suburban, or urban) of districts are either barriers or influential in the implementation of mentoring as it relates to access to mentors, mentoring opportunities built into the district’s goals and priorities, opportunities for promotion to the role of principal, and how these indicators support principal preparation.

Table 5.1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Advantages</th>
<th>Potential Disadvantages</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Small District</strong> (&lt; 10,000 Students)</td>
<td>Close, tightly woven sense of community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonalities between school and community dynamics that provide more similar experiences and challenges for mentoring and movement amongst schools and roles in the district.</td>
<td>Less opportunities for promotion or upward mobility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Large District</strong> (&gt; 10,000 Students)</td>
<td>More robust fiscal resources for internal and external professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel dedicated to support leadership development.</td>
<td>Fewer commonalities between school and community dynamics that present inconsistencies in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More opportunities for promotion or upward mobility based on district allocated leadership positions. experiences and challenges for mentoring and movement amongst schools and roles in the district.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Policy recommendations in this research pivot on districts and states being able to provide professional development and the funding safeguards that are instrumental in providing opportunities for mentoring and leadership development. Particularly with smaller, rural districts in South Carolina, access to mentoring, professional development, or leadership exposure is limited. The findings in this research study point to a need for more consistent, equitable opportunities for leadership development and mentoring from district to district regardless of size or setting. The political context and ideologies of the state is a contributing factor which could be a barrier to investing state level discretionary funds to leadership development. The underlying political influences of a district’s elected leadership could be an unintentional barrier in investing in leaders, when they are instinctually driven to invest in student resources and professional development for teachers.

Professional development to influence the principal pipeline and nationwide turnover crisis prompts the following questions: (1) Why do states continue to ineffectively invest money into principal attrition?, (2) Why “on the job” principal support limited?, and (3) Why was leadership mentoring not at the forefront of policy making prior being outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act, which was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2015 (ESSA, 2015). At the time of the enactment of ESSA, 70% of states invested little to no money in the leadership growth of school level leaders (Council for Chief State School Officers, 2016). In response to this, states have
the option of setting aside a discretionary 3% of Title II, Part A funds as outlined in ESSA to support the professional growth and development of principals, in order to retain them in schools while supporting their leadership skills in order to provide high quality instructional programming for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The Every Student Succeeds Act’s (2015) predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) outlined recommendations for school leader improvement through comprehensive, school wide support, to include teachers and school leaders. Similar to ESSA, No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) required evidence-based improvement strategies. That said, the primary difference between ESSA (2015) and NCLB (2001) is the increased flexibility that states have to develop and implement evidence-based strategies to assist in the development of school leaders. In addition to this, the School Improvement Grant Program under NCLB (2001) was implemented through the Americans Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009) gave states implicit and, often times, explicit recommendations to remove a principal in traditionally low-performing schools (Herman et al. 2017), which remains counterproductive to the improvement of principal churn in high needs schools where effective leaders are needed for a minimum of 5 to 7 years (Seashore-Lewis et al., 2010). This makes a direct connection to how mentoring support could be beneficial to struggling school leaders.

Throughout Title II, Part A of ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act, Title II, Part A, 2015), the development of leadership is addressed through the implementation of evidence-based strategies; however the funding component authorizes states to use approximately $2.7 billion per year (2017 - 2020) in the state’s funding formula to set aside funds to support teacher and school leader development. States have the option of
setting aside an additional 3% of funds in subgrants to improve pathways to the principalship (Public Law No. 114-95, Every Student Succeeds Act, Title II, Part A, Sec. 2101, 2015) to include principal certification options, improving pre-service training, providing differentiated professional development that is specific to the needs of the school leader, recruiting and retaining principals, improving induction and mentoring for early career principals, differentiating pay for hard-to-staff principalships, and offering more focused interventions for school growth objectives (e.g., pre-K readiness, bullying prevention, transition, restorative justice practices, etc.) (Herman, R., Gates, S., et al., 2017). To allow for further perspective on the specificity of the funding allocation recommendations of ESSA, under the amended Title II, Part A, “states can reserve up to 5% of their funding for state activities. States may use some of this reservation for administration (up to 1% of the total Title II-A allocation, which is 20% of the state-level funds). States can then use the remaining 4% of funds for various state-level activities. One of these state activities – expanding teacher, principal, or other school leader preparation academies – is subject to a cap; SEAs may only use up to 2% of the total Title II-A allocation (which is 40% of the state-level funds) for this activity. The remaining 95% must be subgranted to LEAs except that the state has the option to reserve 3% of these funds for state-level activities for principals and other school leaders (leaving approximately 92% for LEA subgrants). This reservation is over and above the 5% for state activities described above” (Chiefs for Change, 2016). Additionally, states also have the leverage to utilize Title I funds to support leadership development in schools serving high-poverty populations, which are traditionally under-performing, and states may strategically address the needs of school leaders by intersecting Title II, Part A
and Title I funds to comprehensively address the leadership needs and priorities in their states (CCCSO, 2015). A stark contrast to the requirements to NCLB (2001), ESSA (2015) gives states more flexibility, with states now having the option to design systems and programming to best address the priorities and focus areas of their state, in an effort to advance leadership development (Rowland, 2015).

Furthermore, Title II, Part B designates the “National Activities” and allows the U.S. Department of Education to allocate $469 million to $479 million per year (2017-2020) for various activities to include the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Fund, which allows for performance based incentives (Public Law No. 114-95, Every Student Succeeds Act, Title II, Part B, Subpart 1, Sec. 2211, December 10, 2015, p. 130), the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant opportunities for non-traditional certification pathways and professional development (Public Law No. 114-95, Every Student Succeeds Act, Title 2, Part B, Subpart 2, Sec. 2242, 2015), and finally the School Leader Recruitment and Support fund, a competitive grant program that supports the recruitment, retention, and training of principals in high needs areas (Public Law No. 114-95, Every Student Succeeds Act, Title 2, Part B, Subpart 4, Sec. 2243, 2015).

Allocation of these funds to support formal mentor training and the implementation of mentor programs is discretionary to the states and could support district and state level mentor professional development.

Armed with this information on strategies that are grounded in evidence-based research, states are moving forward with designing leadership development opportunities that exist in pre-service, inservice, or a hybrid of these two models, in order to support school leaders in their states. In most states, ESSA plans have been developed to focus
on five critical areas of leadership: (1) prioritizing excellent instructional leadership, (2) promoting diverse, equity-focused leadership, (3) distributing leadership and building the principal pipeline, (4) strengthening and innovating pre-service training and development, and (5) focusing on the design of on-the-job principal support (CCCSO, 2016). The on-the-job principal support is at the forefront of supporting inservice and aspiring principals. The level of flexibility provided in Title II, Part A would allow South Carolina to more formally implement programs that are funded, supported, and accessible to districts regardless of size and resources. Being that the size and geographic location (i.e., rural, suburban, and urban) was impactful to the accessibility of mentoring and was influential in the lack of consistency across districts, allocated federal funding could provide leadership development and coaching for in-service and aspiring principals. In the smaller districts in the sample size of this study, the size of the district limited the opportunities for mentoring and any job-embedded support due to the lack of districts being able to secure staffing to be able to prioritize leadership development. To this end, policymakers in South Carolina are strongly encouraged to examine funding for smaller, rural school districts with a focus on leadership development.

It was evident in this study that districts are meeting the required minimum professional development; however, the deepening extension opportunities were limited for inservice and aspiring principals to pursue. The document analysis revealed robust offerings from SCASA (South Carolina Association for School Administrators) to include mentoring options for aspiring principals; however, the participation was inconsistent from district to district. This was due in part to funding in being able to secure a spot in this professional development opportunities and inability to leave one’s
school level responsibilities. The document analysis and participants’ perceptions gleaned from the interviews that their participation in state required leadership development was beneficial; however, the more long term, impactful learning from those who were able to participate in SCASA was highly evident.

From an agency standpoint, the intersectionality of the Office of School Leadership and the Office of School Transformation in the South Carolina Department of Education could be deployed with funds to address the gaps in resources to aid in leadership development and mentoring. This would provide more formal plans for districts that offer support to aspiring school leaders and the principals who would serve as mentors through ongoing professional development and goals-based mentoring. Additionally, existing organizations such as the South Carolina Association for School Administrators (SCASA) could be utilized to not only provide mentoring support but also networking opportunities for aspiring and in-service school leaders who serve in similar settings. SCASA currently maintains robust offerings for leaders of all levels; however, funding for the professional development and brief amounts of time out the school building are negatively impactful to participation. Much like their current CEEL (Center for Executive Education Leadership) model, ongoing, push out support where leadership professional development goes to the school or district would be a strategy to address these barriers.

Practice Implications and Recommendations for School Districts

Throughout the study, additional questions arose as a result of the participants’ feedback during the semi-structured interviews. There were several research areas not addressed as a part of this study that would merit additional research. That said, data
collected to answer the first research question in the study informs districts on the type of attributes that are foundational to mentoring and leadership development in a school context.

Data collected from the participants in this study converged with those of servant leadership characteristics to include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, philosophy, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Greenleaf 1977; Spears, 1994, 2004). Participants in this study added attributes such as compassion, patience, humility, a willingness to push beyond their comfort zone, a slowness to judge, and time to devote as characteristics of principals who demonstrate readiness for mentoring. Throughout this study participants confirmed that they were deeply satisfied with serving others to include those in the school community and, most importantly, those who seek to step into a similar role in school leadership. It is critical for districts to think through the lens of how to support aspiring leaders but also how to reaffirm the commitment of practicing principals as they indicated the satisfaction of mentoring and the revisiting and reflection on deeply held values and beliefs in the process of mentoring. The reciprocal benefit of utilizing in-district principals who possess servant leadership attributes provides opportunities for deep reflection and growth for both partners. Additionally, no participants mentioned that there was a specific criteria to meet regarding years of experience to demonstrate readiness to mentor. It is important for districts to not succumb to the traditional practice of years of experience in the field being an indicator of readiness and to maintain focus on in-district leaders who possess attributes of servant leadership to serve as mentors to aspiring leaders.
While Greenleaf’s (1977) definition of servant leadership is underpinned by attributes of empathy, compassion, and healing, Principal E’s statement on regret in not pushing past our comfort zone as a mentor and assertiveness with inserting truth into a mentoring relationship confirms that compassion is not necessarily defined as full agreement with a mentee’s position. Assistant principals resoundingly mentioned the need for feedback and the absence of feedback being the primary reason for lack of success. These two understandings support a reconsideration of compassion and push back in Greenleaf’s (1977) definition. This study views compassion, empathy, and foresight as vehicles to insert truth and reality into situations that are supported through mentoring. Truth and realistic interpretations can vary and are dependent upon the district or school’s context, the mentor and mentee’s leadership philosophy and beliefs, and the nature of needs of the individuals mentoring and being mentored. It is imperative for districts and states to recruit and support leadership mentors who assert truth and honesty into their process of providing feedback.

Secondly, one participant (Assistant Principal C) detailed an experience in his initial years of school leadership as a crisis. An extension of this research could be differentiating between the types of job embedded mentoring to include mentoring in a crisis scenario versus mentoring through a trajectory approach. This recommendation would take this study a step further to analyze if the attributes are different for the given scenario or if there are key attributes that transcend all types of school leadership mentoring.

As mentioned in the limitations, the COVID-19 pandemic placed burden on the access to participants; however, future research could explore how the school
environmental and policy factors shaped by the pandemic impact the need for mentoring support in principal preparation. The stressors of the pandemic, as evidenced by peripheral comments made by the participants in the interviews, has shaped leadership styles and practices. To this end, inquiry could focus on how these stressors impact the needs of aspiring principals, as well as the mentoring capacity of inservice principals.

The ability for principals to select their assistant principals through an autonomous process emerged as a barrier in this study. Additionally, this is an observation I have made as a practitioner in talking with my principal colleagues regarding assistant principals that they received through their remaining in their role upon principal turnover, being transferred within a district, or having an assistant principal placed in a role through district recruitment processes. Selection autonomy was an unexpected barrier that emerged from both participant groups as an obstacle to the slowly developed or nonexistent relationship between the assistant principal and principal. Additional research could uncover whether or not selection autonomy is a true barrier to the mentoring relationship and overall functioning of the school and how this could inform districts’ recruitment and placement practices.

Summary
This research study addresses the gap in the literature regarding the lack of mentoring as a tool for principal preparation and support. The attributes and readiness of in-service principals to mentor their current assistant principal(s) as they aspire to be principals. This study uncovered attributes of principal mentors who demonstrate readiness consistent with those of Greenleaf’s (1977) servant leadership theory, which includes listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, philosophy, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and
building community (Spears 1994, 2004). The unique void filled by this study includes the comparison of mentoring readiness through the lens of decoupled principals and assistant principals from diverse backgrounds, school and community settings, and professional experiences. Through deeper exploration of these perceptions, readiness was indicated by the principals’ servant leadership characteristics, willingness to collaborate through openness and authenticity, and these attributes and readiness indicators were enhanced by a clear vision of the assistant principal’s trajectory.

Prior to the start of this study the body of literature demonstrated that mentoring was an informal means to support a junior level employee in a supervisory role. This perception is based on the traditional definition of mentoring and lacks consideration for the differences of the six different types of mentoring according to literature. This study extends the body of literature to include the attributes of successful mentors, job embedded support for aspiring principals that is specific to the school environment and district context, and the complexities of the roles of school leaders and how they can be supported through mentoring. Additionally, the success of mentoring also pivots on the trajectory of the assistant principal and their perceived readiness and desire to pursue the role of the principal. State programs has also failed to address the needs of leadership development outside of the mandated programs to fulfill certification through the South Carolina Department of Education. Through the use of ESSA Title II, states have the flexibility to allocate funding for leadership development. As such, it is imperative to invest in school leadership despite political ideology or climate. This investment in school leadership is foundational to building positive school cultures to retain teachers and improve student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Garies, 2015). Additionally, this
study explores the variances in districts’ approaches to the preparation and support of their building leaders, and it is paramount for the state to address the different contexts of districts when implementing programming. Essentially, it is not enough to allocate resources without deploying specific plans to include the expansion upon current programs offered through the SCDE but to also incorporate many of the networking and mentoring strategies offered through organizations such as SCASA.

The autobiographical manner in which I approached this study allowed me to unpack my assumptions that mentoring is based upon relational capacity, conducive district working conditions, intrinsic nature of adult learning, gender as a secondary influence to mentoring, and the profound implications for lack of support. Alvesson (2003) and Roulston (2010) suggest that the establishment of a genuine rapport with participants through the romantic conception of interviewing, and I found this to be evident throughout the study as participants shared their experiences and perceptions. Being an “insider and outsider” in this study afforded me a unique opportunity to not only collect data but to weave together patterns of my own experiences with the similarities and differences of the backgrounds and perceptions of my participant groups, as both participant groups seek to enhance school leadership as a practice. The reflective practices in which I engaged in throughout the study (Maxwell, 2013) allowed me to acquire, situate, and communicate new knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) in light of my insider knowledge of being a middle level principal in South Carolina.

Four significant themes and findings emerged in this study to include the characteristics of mentors as servant leaders, barriers that mask mentoring attributes, actionable, goals-based trajectory mentoring, and servant leadership attributes deemed as
more important and used as a vehicle to share experiences. As a researcher and practitioner, I am encouraged by the willingness to engage in professional learning which supports one of my school leadership beliefs in that student learning is dependent on adult learning. This statement truly captures what mentoring is designed to do, which is to influence practice and shape beliefs through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1985) and experiential learning influencing behavior and leadership practices (Bandura 1977, 1986) and readiness.
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