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Usefulness of Field Experience Component of a Principal Preparation Program

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education

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George A. Roberts

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Usefulness of Field Experience Component of a Principal Preparation Program

by

George A. Roberts

MA, Bowie State University, 1998

BS, Towson University, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

September 2019

Abstract

A lack of knowledge about the usefulness of a field experience component within the associate principal preparation program for assistant principals drove this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the beliefs of system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of the field experience component and to examine archival end-of-course survey data from past participants. Constructivism and adult learning theory constituted the conceptual framework. Twelve leaders who were participants or administrators of the program within a large mid-Atlantic school district in the United States were participants. Qualitative data sources included interviews and archival data from the associate principal preparation program. A combination of descriptive and in vivo coding was used to support interpretive analysis. Results indicated the most useful components of the principal preparation program were the experiential nature of the program, opportunity for reflective thinking for participants, benefits of mentoring throughout the field experience, and empowerment felt by participants as they practiced skills learned during the field experience in their first year as principals. Recommendations based on these findings included a lengthened field experience and greater focus on the criteria used to match aspiring principals with mentor principals. Participants also noted fiscal and human capital resources were needed. A related recommendation could be to extend the field experience over 2 years to provide opportunities for associate principals to participate in experiences in the beginning and end of the school year in addition to the middle of the school year experiences provided. This research could provide support for districts interested in assessing the usefulness of their principal preparation programs.

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Dedication

First, I would like to dedicate this body of work to my wife, Christine, who without her love, support, encouragement, and patience I would not have been able to reach this milestone in my education. You always have and will continue to inspire me to greater heights, and I am forever grateful and love you for that. To my daughters, Serena, Marlana, and Hope, you are my everything. All I do is for you and this paper is no different. Lastly, to my mother, Marta, and my sister, Barbara, who believed in me 25-years ago when not too many others did. Your support, love, and commitment to my education have allowed me to reach this point. Simply put, all those for whom this paper is dedicated have laid a critical piece of the foundation for this work and for that, I dedicate this paper and my never-ending appreciation and love to each of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The principal is the most influential position within any school (Bush, 2016; Orphanos & Orr, 2014); therefore, preparation for the role is critical to the demands of leading schools in the 21st century (Lipke & Manaseri, 2019). Aspiring principals should be exposed to experiences needed to be successful principals prior to formally taking on the role of the principalship. Multiple studies have analyzed principal preparation programs and how best to prepare principals for their role (Anderson, 2017; Kearney & Valadez, 2015; Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015; The Wallace Foundation, 2016; Young & Eddy-Spicer, 2019). Principals must be able to practice a hybrid form of leadership that allows all school stakeholders an opportunity to participate in the school's progress (Gronn, 2008). However, current research has yet to explore fully the usefulness of the field experience component of principal preparation programs and how they prepare aspiring principals (Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014).

Bush (2016) noted the importance of comprehensive and systemic principal training programs, which links leadership training with learning outcomes that will prepare aspiring principals for the demands and multifaceted roles of the principal role. Campbell and Parker (2016) said such programs should be aligned to national standards and contain practical field experiences for aspiring principals to be better positioned to become effective principals in their first year. The state of Illinois explored a re-design of their state-level principal preparation programs by designing and aligning their program with Educational Leadership Policy Standards, as well as their own Illinois state school

leadership standards in an attempt to provide clearer guidance and a common principal preparation framework for school districts in Illinois (Hackmann & Malin, 2016).

Though the research is clear that field experiences in principal preparation programs are warranted, little research exists regarding the beliefs of school system leaders and past participants of programs who are currently principals. This study addressed the lack of knowledge involving the usefulness of a field experience component in a principal preparation program in terms of the beliefs of school system leaders and past participants who are currently principals. The role of the principal includes instructional leadership, data analysis, facilitating professional learning for teachers, teacher evaluation, and coaching, as well as more traditional skills related to communication and management of a school's day-to-day operations (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Gentilucci, Denti, & Guaglianone, 2013; McKibbin, 2013; Miller & Martin, 2014). It is for these reasons that an imperative exists to gather input from school system leaders who hire and supervise principals, as well as current principals who participated in principal preparation field experiences, in order to provide information to school districts regarding how to enhance or improve the field experience components of principal preparation programs.

This chapter provides background literature on the topic of field experiences within principal preparation programs. The problem and purpose of this study were framed in terms of beliefs of the usefulness of field experiences in principal preparation programs according to district leaders and previous participants of a principal preparation program. Two research questions focused on gathering beliefs and analyzing archival

data from end-of-course surveys, taken from participants in a principal preparation program in order to compare beliefs from then to now. The constructivist learning theories of Piaget (1977), Dewey (1916), Bruner (1966), and Merriam (2008) provided the conceptual framework for the study. I used a qualitative case study as the methodological approach for this study where I gathered information from in-person interviews with 10 system leaders and current principals who participated in a principal preparation program to gather their beliefs regarding the usefulness of field experiences within the program. I also used archival information from end-of-course surveys as part of the data analysis. Lastly, I defined key terms with accompanying descriptions of assumptions, limitations, scope, delimitations, and significance of the study prior to a chapter summary.

Background

Alhouti and Male (2017) reported in their research of international principal programs that field-based learning allowed participants to apply knowledge learned in other classroom-based learning in their overall principal preparation programs. Several models existed for the application of learning; however, field experiences demonstrated the highest influence for retention of learned information based on input from aspiring principals (Matsuo, 2015). Field experiences forced participants to apply learned information and the opportunity to synthesize and adapt the skills to meet the needs of the situations they may face daily over the course of the field experience. The ability to adapt and apply learned knowledge was critically important in an increasingly litigious society where stakeholders readily resort to legal action to resolve educational disputes with

schools or school systems (The School Superintendents Association, 2018). School principal preparation programs must integrate classroom knowledge around legal theory with field experiences and real-world expectations of being a principal (Petty, 2016).

The duration of field experiences continued to expand across principal preparation programs across the United States, particularly in university-level programs where field experiences were being expanded to four academic semesters, or two full years, versus the traditional two academic semesters or 1 year, experiences (Larsen, 2016). Universities expanded opportunities to provide a richer learning experience for aspiring principals, which better prepared them for the role of principal. The additional hours in schools participating in extended field experiences provided candidates opportunities to learn all aspects of the principalship, including financial, instructional, communication, and long-term planning.

The extension of field experiences also had the effect of allowing aspiring principals to develop and maintain a stronger mentor-mentee relationships with the principal of the school where the field experience took place. Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) found that participants who engaged in a rich learning field-based experience with an experienced mentor principal, where they learned more about their beliefs of race, possessed strengthened equity leadership as new principals. Additional research of archival survey data of current principals who participated in principal preparation programs with a mentor principal, found that when aspiring principals, i.e. mentees, were provided opportunities to reflect and discuss field experience learning with their mentor principal, the aspiring principals reported being more comfortable and prepared to handle the

routine tasks of the job and focus more on what they considered to be the most important aspects of being a principal, such as vision setting and daily instruction (Johnson, 2016). This study built upon this current research by exploring the usefulness of a field experience component of a principal preparation program using a case study approach.

Problem Statement

The problem was the lack of knowledge about the usefulness of a field experience component for the associate principal preparation program for assistant principals. A gap in practice existed since no investigation had ever been conducted on the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program from the beliefs of system leaders and past participants. This study explored the lack of knowledge around the usefulness of a field experience component in a principal preparation program from the beliefs of school system leaders and past participants who are currently principals and its usefulness from the belief of district leaders and past participants. The goals of the field experience component of the study's associate principal preparation program involved experiences with vision setting, instruction, assessment, technology, professional learning for teachers, community involvement, and developing a safe and orderly school environment. This study will build upon existing research that indicated aspiring principals needed to spend more time in schools engaged in multiple experiences, which allowed them to apply learned theories and ideas to these real-world school settings (Pannell, Peltier-Glaze, Haynes, Davis, & Skelton, 2015).

Principal preparation program personnel were also beginning to understand the increased value of field experiences as seen in North Carolina and Tennessee who

expanded required field experiences within their districts' preparation programs to 1,000 and 540 hours respectively (Jones & Ringler, 2017; Kearney & Valadez, 2015). The Wallace Foundation (2016) said that intensive structured clinical experiences in school settings provided aspiring principals authentic experiences and reflective opportunities with their mentor principals to build their own principal leadership capacity. In addition, when authentic feedback was provided by experienced principal mentors to aspiring principals over the course of a field experience, a deeper learning experience was reported by aspiring principals when end-of-course survey data are analyzed (Schechter & Firuz, 2015).

Many field experiences for aspiring principals were between one and two semesters over the course of 1 academic school year (Lehman, 2013). However, this case study will focus on the 4-week field experience component of an associate principal preparation program where a clear gap in practice existed. Information was gathered from participants using semistructured interviews. This information guided instructors and district policymakers regarding the future development of field experiences for the associate principal program within this school district.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to describe the beliefs of system leaders and past participants in terms of the usefulness of the field experience component of a principal preparation program as well as an examination of archival program data to provide recommendations for the principal preparation program at one mid-Atlantic state. The lack of knowledge regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of the

associate principal preparation program served as the key problem for this study. A constructivist paradigm served as the conceptual framework for the study. The need for this study was important to the program and district as it provided an examination of the 4-week field experience component of the associate principal program for the past 4 years of the program's implementation and included possible recommendations for continued refinement and improvement. Insights regarding the implementation of the field experience was sought from system leaders and past participants.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the beliefs of system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of the principal preparation program?

RQ2: How do the current beliefs of principals who have participated in the principal preparation program compare to their beliefs at the time of completion of the program as described in archival data?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this case study was based on elements of constructivism from the theories of Piaget, Dewey, Bruner, and Merriam. Piaget (1977) and Dewey (1916) found that learners must be active participants or active learners who used their senses to make sense and construct meaning. According to Dewey (1916), learners must engage with the world and not passively accept the knowledge that exists in their environment. Bruner (1966) focused, in part, on intellectual growth through interaction with others, i.e. mentor-mentee or teacher-student relationship, as well as a person's ability to "deal with several alternatives simultaneously, to tend to several

sequences during the same period of time, and to allocate time and attention in a manner appropriate to these multiple demands” (p. 6). Merriam (2008), said that learning is not solely an individualistic process where the learner makes singular meaning based on sensory inputs; rather, the environment in which the learning occurs was equally important for the learner. In addition, Freiler (2008) said that learning is a multidimensional act where the learner’s emotional, spiritual, and psychological mindsets are critical influencers in terms of how people process and learn new information.

The framework elements informed the examination of beliefs of system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of a field experience component of a principal preparation program through a case study design. A high-quality field experience for aspiring principals where they are exposed to all facets of the principalship better prepared them to discharge their responsibilities as first-year principals (Beard, 2018; Cordeiro & Smith-Sloan, 1995; Kearney & Valadez, 2015). The day-to-day job of a principal supports the need for authentic, high-quality, and meaningful field experiences for aspiring principals. Internships allowed participants to engage fully (physically, emotionally, psychologically) with all stakeholders in the field experience school and in a different environment from where they work. Interview queries were designed to address interactions, mentoring, and active learning of the field experience participants.

This study focused on the beliefs of system leaders and past participants, gathered through interviews and analysis of archival data in the form of end-of-course numeric and descriptive survey data, regarding the usefulness of a field experience component within

a principal preparation program. The participants were involved in a qualitative case study. A qualitative case study allowed them to share their beliefs and ideas regarding the usefulness of a field experience component to provide recommendations to program implementers.

Nature of the Study

This study used a qualitative case study design where primarily descriptive data were gathered from interviews and document analysis with 12 system leaders and past participants of the associate principal preparation program within one large suburban-urban school district in the mid-Atlantic region. Qualitative case study design provides exploration and understanding of complex issues (Tellis, 1997; Zainal, 2007). Albright, Howard-Pitney, Roberts, and Zicarelli (1998) explained the use of case study methodology when a researcher required an intense study of a factor within any unit. Creswell (2014) said that case studies are time-intensive studies which immerse the researcher in the research topic and allow him or her to gather data from multiple sources including observations and interviews. Keeping the focus of the research on data from interviews and archival data regarding beliefs of system leaders and past participants in terms of the usefulness of the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program was consistent with the constructivist learning theories of Piaget (1977), Dewey (1916), Bruner (1966), and Merriam (2008). This case study assisted in providing information regarding the usefulness of field experiences within this principal preparation program and recommendations for future implementation.

Definitions

The following terms and phrases are defined as used in this study:

Archival Data: For the purpose of this study, archival data included any of the internal operational records that signers of the consent form deemed appropriate for for analysis. For the purposes of this study, archival data were numeric and descriptive responses from surveys that were collected by leadership or other pertinent stakeholders (Walden University Case Study Manual, 2017).

Aspiring Principal: Any school employee of an elementary or secondary school or local educational agency with the appropriate qualifications who wishes to be responsible for daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in an elementary or secondary school (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2018).

Associate Principal preparation program: An educational leadership program designed to train teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to move to a school leadership position. Principal preparation programs consisted of university, district-based, third-party professional development, and for-profit organizations (Wallace Foundation, 2016). For the purposes of this study, the specific program was the associate principal preparation program of the case study location.

Field experience: A reflective activity where the learner is placed in a setting where they perceive relationships and connections between the parts of the experience to derive meaning and engage in a learning loop (Dewey, 1916).

Assumptions

It was assumed that the system leaders and past participants who agreed to participate in this case study provided honest opinions regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of a principal preparation program. It was assumed that past participants provided honest beliefs in the archival data. It was also assumed that past participants provided honest views in the archival data.

Scope and Delimitations

This case study was conducted in one district in the mid-Atlantic United States. System leaders and past participants in the principal preparation program were all employees of the same district and serving as principals or in executive leadership positions. The executive system leader participants included the superintendent, community superintendents, chief of organizational development, and executive directors. Three current principals who were previous participants of the principal preparation program were also interviewed for this case study. The results and findings presented in this case study were based largely on these participants' beliefs on the usefulness of the field experience component of the principal preparation program. This case study focused solely on the field experience component of a principal preparation program; therefore, beliefs regarding other aspects of the preparation program will not be explored in this case study. Because this case study was conducted in one district in the mid-Atlantic, outcomes may not be applicable to all populations.

Limitations

System leaders and past participants of the principal preparation program were asked to volunteer; therefore, the study was limited due to the voluntary and self-reporting nature of the study. All participants were informed prior to their interviews that they may withdraw from the interview or study at any time and could review the transcript of their interview prior to formally including it in the study. Each of the participants had at least 10 years with the district, with an overall range of 10 to 25 years with the system. Each participant had also served in the schoolhouse as a teacher or principal, but only the principals in the study participated in the principal preparation program as designed in 2014. Each participant earned at minimum a master's degree, and four of the participants had earned their doctorate in education. All participants worked closely in their daily jobs and some have personal friendships beyond the school day. These varying levels of participation and knowledge of the principal preparation program, years of experience with the school system, and level of education may have limited the ability to recreate or apply the potential findings of this study to other settings.

I worked with seven of the 10 participants on a semiregular basis as part of my daily job and have worked with them for the past 4 years. As an executive leader, many of the participants in this case study were colleagues of mine. However, I did not work with, nor supervise, the principals or executive system leaders who were part of the study. These existing relationships presented a danger of producing unintended biases on the study. Creswell (2014) referred to these types of local studies and stressed the need for the researcher to disclose this information early in the study. Steps were taken to

mitigate bias in this study by conducting consistently-formatted interviews in a private meeting room with the appropriate releases and acknowledgments signed by each participant prior to interviews. In addition, all transcripts were recorded, professionally transcribed, reviewed by the interviewee, and confidentially reviewed by a peer administrator not involved in the study prior to any data analysis taking place.

Significance

The principal is the most influential position in the schoolhouse (Bush, 2016; Orphanos & Orr, 2014). High-quality principal preparation with related field experiences ensures aspiring principals are exposed to experiences which better prepares them for the role of principal. Current and former school principals understand the demands and expectations of the day-to-day as well as long-term role of the job. Prior to incorporating field experiences into the principal preparation program in my school district, first-year principals were often not able to anticipate common problems and devise plans. New principals were left in the position of calling colleagues to get answers for fear of asking their supervisor too many questions early in their tenure as principals. From these real-life experiences and feedback from new principals arose the need to incorporate high quality research-based field experience program in the school district to support new principals.

Furthermore, the marked differences between elementary, middle, and high school principal expectations revealed a deeper need to provide field experiences, which provided leveled opportunities for aspiring principals to apply their classroom learning to school settings which they desired and anticipated working in as first-year principals

(Gedik & Bellibas, 2015). Elementary principals were more focused on instructional leadership traits and sought to build consensus and build a shared sense of purpose within the school; high school principals focused more on acquiring and allocating resources and viewed their staff as part of a complex organization rather than a reflective workgroup (Gedik & Bellibas, 2015). A high-quality field experience allows aspiring principals to learn in settings and be mentored by principals who address professional growth needs regardless of the educational level sought by the aspiring leader.

The findings of this research will provide an exploration of the usefulness of a field experience component of a principal preparation program. The outcomes of this case study will provide additional information to system leaders and program managers of principal preparation programs regarding how best to develop and maintain the field experience component of principal preparation programs, which in turn will produce better-prepared principals who positively influence students, teachers, parents, and the communities they serve.

Summary

A lack of appraisal regarding the usefulness of a field experience component of a locally focused associate principal preparation program was identified for this study. The usefulness of a field experience component of a principal preparation program was important for a school district to understand as it continued to refine the field experience for future participants. This study explored the usefulness of a field experience component of a principal preparation program from the beliefs of system leaders and past program participants. Archival survey data from past participants were also analyzed as

part of this study. In Chapter 1, I focused on establishing the importance of field experiences within principal preparation programs as a way for aspiring principals to apply their classroom learning and develop relationships with existing principals (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Guerra, Zamora, Hernandez, & Menchaca, 2017; Matsuo, 2015). Two research questions anchored the study with a conceptual framework based on the theories of Piaget (1977), Dewey (1916), Bruner (1966), and Merriam (2008) who explained that learners must apply knowledge in the real-world to ascribe meaning to what they have learned. A case study approach was the most beneficial design for this study as it allowed an intense focus on the phenomenon of this study (Creswell, 2014). Four key terms were defined in this study for greater understanding by the reader. Assumptions included cooperation among participants and honesty in their feedback with the scope of the study being a large suburban-urban district in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Limitations included the transferability of the study's findings due to the size of the case study and the number of participants, as well as the established relationships between the participants. The study was significant as it contributed to the confirmation of existing practices or refinement of existing practices of the field experience component within the associate principal preparation program. Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the literature search strategies with a more detailed explanation of the conceptual framework and literature review involving field experiences within principal preparation programs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem in this study focused on the lack of knowledge regarding the usefulness of a field experience component for an associate principal preparation program. A gap in practice existed since no investigation had ever been conducted regarding the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program in terms of the beliefs of system leaders and past participants. This study explored the usefulness of the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program from the belief of district leaders and past participants. The purpose of this case study was to explore the beliefs of system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program, while also examining archival data to analyze past participant beliefs regarding their current practices as principals to provide recommendations for the program.

Backor and Gordon (2015) said that field experiences were one of the three most important components of any principal preparation program. Baxter, Thessin, and Clayton (2014) reached similar conclusions with research based on the beliefs of 19 current principals who had recently completed a principal preparation program, which was a factor that was analyzed in this study. These principals shared that they highly valued field experiences in their preparation programs because the experiences exposed them to the daily routines of the principal job. Kearney and Valadez (2015) said that field experiences have so much value that the hours required for participants should be increased to provide more time for them to engage with their mentor principal and school location. Ninety-two percent of principals who participated in field experiences reported

that they found the field experience more beneficial than any coursework associated with the preparation program (Johnson, 2016). Therefore, it is important to gather the beliefs of current system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of the field experience component within this case study. This chapter begins with an explanation of the literature search strategy, continues with a detailed conceptual framework where the foundational theories of experiential learning are explored to highlight the importance of hands-on field experiences for aspiring principals, and concludes with a literature review related to the key concepts in the study with an associated summary and conclusions drawn from literature.

Literature Search Strategy

Initial searches were conducted on the Internet regarding principal preparation programs and narrowed to field experiences as part of principal preparation programs. Additional searches were conducted regarding theorists and theories to support experiential learning. Initial searches for articles, books, and texts broadened to electronic databases from Walden University. Specific databases were searched including ERIC, ProQuest, Google Scholar, Education Source, SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis Online, and NCES Publications. A combination of descriptors was used to include (a) *principal preparation*, and; (b) *field experiences*. Literature related to application of knowledge and standards learned in the classroom and field experience by principal preparation participants, the appropriate duration of field experiences, and influence of the mentor-mentee relationship during the field experience was the result of a broad use of related search terms to support the problem, purpose, and research questions using

databases such as Taylor and Frances Online, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, and NCES Publications. The conceptual framework was supported by search terms aimed at experiential learning, hands-on learning, and application of knowledge. Lastly, research studies, case studies, and dissertations related to principal preparation and field experiences were used to assist in determining the most appropriate ways to organize this study. Peer-reviewed articles, books, and texts from 2014-2019 were given priority with supporting articles, books, and texts from earlier providing additional supporting information and historical context. The searches provided me information to plan, implement, and report findings for the case study.

Conceptual Framework

This study focused on the beliefs of system leaders and past participants through interviews and analysis of archival data in the form of end-of-course survey data regarding the usefulness of a field experience component within an associate principal preparation program. The participants shared their beliefs and ideas regarding the usefulness of this component to provide recommendations to program implementers. A field experience is a reflective activity where learners are placed in a setting where they perceive relationships and connections between the parts of the experience to derive meaning and engage in a learning loop (Dewey, 1916). The act of constructing and deriving meaning within one's environment while engaging in reflective practice and building relationships served as the conceptual lens through which this study was anchored.

Constructivism is an essential aspect of field experiences for aspiring leaders who wish to become principals. Piaget (1977), as one of the first theorists to approach learning from a non-realist perception, offered said that learning is a process or cycle versus a more concrete phenomenon purported by leading scholars of the early twentieth century such as James (Kolb, 2015). Piaget, building on the work of the functional and application-based learning theories of Dewey, focused more on how people learned than what people learned through the building of schema based on the learner's environment affecting their ability to retain and apply new learning. Piaget (1977) found that learning was a process of socialization within one's environment that provided the experiences and richness of opportunity to learn and apply knowledge. Only through interactions with their environment and application of knowledge could learners construct meaning from their learning. Adults specifically construct meaning through concept, reflection, and action (Piaget, 1970). Participation in field experiences allows aspiring leaders to practice Piaget's learning cycle by acquiring concepts of leadership in the classroom, reflecting on the concepts, and then acting upon them during their field experience.

The types of field experiences found in the literature review support this conceptual lens as aspiring principals from around the world participate in a wide range of hands-on principal leadership experiences, such as leading faculty meetings, evaluative conferences with teachers, facilitating professional learning with teachers, and meeting with community groups such as the PTA, which support their classroom-based learning (Anderson, 2017; Backor & Gordon, 2015; Merchant, & Garza, 2015; Smith, & Somers, 2016). These types of experiences were what Dewey (1916) described as the continuity

of experiences that play a critical role in a person's learning. Dewey (1916) noted "as an individual passed from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts" (p. 44). Piaget and Dewey agreed that It is through a cycle or loop of experiences and interactions with one's environment that a person continually learns and relearns information. Bruner (1966) expanded on this idea by emphasizing that learners construct meaning and knowledge by building on prior experiences and that learning is derived from cumulative experiences. The literature regarding field experiences is clear that aspiring principals must spend hours if not weeks or months immersed in field experiences within the school environment to interact with principals, administrators, students, teachers, staff, and parents to truly learn the job of the principal (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Figueiredo-Brown, Campo-Ringler, & James, 2015; Kearney & Valadez, 2015).

Principal preparation program personnel across the United States and world build into their field experiences an opportunity for aspiring principals to be mentored by experienced principals, whether as part of the actual field experience or an extension of the classroom-based learning experience (Schechter & Firuz, 2015; Weiner & Burton, 2016). Bruner (1966) and Merriam's (2008) theories support the notion that mentorship is a natural outreach of constructivist theory where learners use and apply their experiences to develop relationships. Merriam (2008) explained that relationships formed through experiences are not just a part of the learning process, but essential to it. Merriam said that "adult education does not occur in a vacuum" (p. 408) and that intuition and imagination are honed through experiences and relationships with others. Piaget (1970)

also noted that learning is active based on feeling and action on the part of the learner. The mentor-mentee relationship allows aspiring principals to use several facets of constructivist theory, including the acquisition of concepts and putting learned concepts into action, and being able to reflect on learning with an experienced principal who has gone through similar experiences and can share lessons learned with the aspiring principal. Constructivist theory is the most appropriate conceptual lens with which to research the usefulness of field experiences within this case study. Field experiences are, by definition, an activity where the aspiring principal is placed in a school for weeks or months to apply concepts from the classroom in daily, hands-on leadership activities while under the supervision of a mentor principal. The aspiring principal engages in a continual learning cycle or loop, continually reflecting on their experiences with the goal of one day becoming a principal.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Field Experiences

Field experiences, as part of principal preparation programs, were shown to be an integral component to preparing principals in school districts nationally and internationally (Gates, Baird, Doss, Hamilton, Opper, Master, Tuma, Vuollo, & Zaber, 2019; Guerra, Zamora, Hernandez, & Menchaca, 2017; Gurr & Drysdale, 2015 & Kearney & Valadez, 2015; Pointer, 2018; Staub & Bravender, 2014), with recent reports showing 74% of current principals in seven states in the southern United States having participated in field experiences as part of their principal preparation program (Dodson, 2015a) to as high as 84% of current principals having participated in some type of field experience in their

principal preparation program in recent study in the mid-West United States (Johnson, 2016). 92% of principals noted that their field experiences served as the most important component of their principal preparation program (Johnson, 2016). However, the term ‘field experience’ in the literature was often interchanged with similar meaning terms such as internships, practicums, pre-service, and residencies (Campbell, & Parker, 2016; Cosner, 2019; Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015; Hackmann, & Malin, 2016; Pannell, et al., 2015). For example, Kearney and Valadez (2015) used the terms field experience and interns when they noted under a heading of “Field Experiences.... that increasing the number of hours interns spend working in local schools may hold great promise” (p. 28). Some university-level principal preparation programs have increased their field experience hours as a result of updated research on the topic (O’Malley & Capper, 2015).

For the purposes of this case study on the usefulness of a field experience component of an associate principal preparation program, the term ‘field experiences’ was used to describe the reflective activities where the learner is placed in a setting where they perceive relationships and connections between the parts of the experience to derive meaning and engage in a ‘learning loop’ (Dewey, 1916). This definition was at the heart of constructivist theory where meaning is derived from immersion in a situation and knowledge was gained by the learner from interpreting the parts which form the whole. For aspiring principals, it was critical for them to have opportunities to put into practice the learning and theory they acquired in the regular classroom setting into school settings with actual students, teachers, and current principals (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

Field experiences, depending on the program, ranged from weeks long experiences, month-long experiences, and, in increasing cases, year-long experiences that provided aspiring principals the opportunity to engage, create, reflect, and adapt their classroom learning with the experiential learning occurring in the field experience location (Backor & Gordon, 2015; Bush, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Larsen, 2016; Petty, 2016; The Wallace Foundation, 2017; Yongmei, Rorrer, Pounder, Young, & Korach, 2019).

Activities in field experiences had a similarly wide variety of options for aspiring principals' dependent on the goals of the program coordinators. Problem-based activities shown by the literature to be the most highly rated by aspiring principals were activities related to vision and mission creation and teacher evaluation, instructional leadership responsibilities, and shadowing of the principal (Backor, & Gordon, 2015; Merchant, & Garza, 2015; Smith, & Somers, 2016), with some programs offering field experiences in the area of school law to prepare aspiring principals for the labyrinth of potential legal issues principals faced (Petty, 2016). Thomas, McDonald, Russell, and Hutchinson (2018), in their study of Missouri principal preparation programs, noted that "job-embedded activities are incorporated throughout the coursework to give students the opportunity to work with 'real-world' situations and issues" (p. 6). With the myriad of field experience designs and activities, the literature was rich in supporting best practices which provided the most useful opportunities for field experience components of a principal preparation program. Much of the literature utilized for this literature review was qualitative in nature with interviews of sample populations of educators providing the breadth of information for this review. However, it is important to note that the

sample populations used in the current literature primarily consisted of university professors, superintendents, experienced principals, and aspiring principals actively participating in preparation programs. A gap existed in current literature on the usefulness of field experiences as part of principal preparation programs from the belief of other school district leaders, including creators of principal preparation programs, and recently exited principals from such programs and field experiences. This methodology was consistent with the qualitative case study approach used for this study where information was primarily gathered from interviews with system leaders, and recently exited past participants of the location's principal preparation program. One mixed method article (Guerra, et al., 2017) and no purely quantitative research was found during this study. Survey and other quantifiable methodologies can be helpful in identifying the usefulness of field experiences within principal preparation programs as very little to no quantifiable studies can be found on the topic.

Hours. Though field experiences as part of principal preparation programs were supported through the current literature, no research existed which recommended a specific length or period for the field experiences (Anderson, 2017; Pannell, et al., 2015). However, several university professors associated with principal preparation programs often noted that most principal preparation programs should investigate ways to lengthen field experience components for aspiring principals (Backor & Gordon, 2015). This was evident in the wide range of time aspiring principals spent participating in field experiences as they prepared for the principal job.

The fewest number of field experiences was reported by Cosner et al., (2015) who noted that participants in their study of a principal preparation program within a doctoral program at the University of Chicago ranged within 5 to 6-day long visits to shadow principals and compare their classroom learning with the day-to-day experiences of principals. Jones and Ringler (2017) in their study of 53 aspiring principals claimed that candidates must devote at least 1000 hours of field experience time in the second year of their program. This amount of time was supported by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) who mandated extensive internship experience in their 2008 Educational Leadership Policy Standards (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). The University of Connecticut Administrator Principal Preparation Program (UCAPP) recommended 80 days of administrative field experiences for aspiring principals in the state of Connecticut (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), which was a reduction from their original recommendation of aspiring principals having full-time field experiences in a school location to gain the necessary experience to prepare for the principalship. Larsen (2016) noted in his study of regional principal preparation programs in Ohio that, on average, Ohio programs required four semesters of field experiences over two academic years, which was also supported by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). CAEP noted that these extensive field experiences provided its students with a breadth of experiences and level of richness in clinical experiences that only this amount of time could afford. The University of Missouri issued recommendations for their state's field experience components to being two semesters over one academic year (Thomas, et al., 2018). State officials in Missouri felt this amount

of time for aspiring principals to work in schools as part of their preparation program was an opportunity for them to broaden their skills for the principalship while enhancing their chances at employment as a principal in the state of Missouri.

The state of Tennessee required its aspiring principals to spend at least 180 hours of time engaged in field experiences in schools, with some university programs such as East Tennessee State requiring its students to spend at least 540 hours of time engaged in field experiences in Tennessee schools (Kearney & Valadez, 2015). The rationale for such an extensive field experience for East Tennessee State was like other university programs which hoped to build the leadership capacity and skill set of aspiring principals to make them as ready as possible for their first year as principals. Figueiredo-Brown, Campo-Ringler, and James (2015) in their study of East Carolina University's (ECU) principal preparation program found that a field experience program that lasts at least one year provided enough time for aspiring principals to learn the culture of a school community, fully assess the needs of their field experience location, and be exposed to a high number of varied experiences to adequately prepare them for their first year as principals. Because of this study, ECU now requires its aspiring principals, through its new Masters of School Administration program, to spend at least 1,000 hours of field experience time in local schools. Merchant and Garza (2015) in their study of principal preparation programs in San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) noted that principals spend, on average, only one semester in their field experience component of their principal preparation program, which was a significant increase in field experience time expressed by current principals in SAISD. Though the literature supported the

inconsistency across the nation with required number of hours/semesters for field experiences, with the majority of states simply requiring field experiences with no specific recommendations for their local education authorities, such as Maryland (Dodson, 2015), the literature was very clear that field experiences were a critical component of any principal preparation program (Guerra et al., 2017) regardless of the number of hours, days, weeks, months, or years spent engaged in them.

Types of Experiences. The types of experiences aspiring principals are exposed to determine their level of overall success when they begin their first year as principals. Therefore, it is important that a well-structured field experience provide wide and deep experiences to allow the aspiring principal the opportunity to synthesize classroom theory on teaching, learning, school finance, school law, facilities, communication, and relationship building with practical experiences that allow them to make mistakes and continue to grow and learn as school leaders. The literature was just as varied with respect to the most influential field experiences as it was with the length of field experiences. However, as with lengthy field experiences, the literature supported as varied a set of opportunities as possible when placing aspiring principals in field experiences. The relationship between expectations and outcomes within the field experience opportunities for aspiring principals was important (Cosner et al., 2015). Cosner et al. noted that aspiring principals should have a “leadership development competency plan” (p. 18) when they begin their field experiences to assist with reflection and learning as the field experience continues. These plans also served to benefit the aspiring principal as he or she de-briefed the field experience with their professor or

mentor.

Field experience plans should cover a wide range of daily principal activities to better prepare aspiring principals for the day-to-day expectations of the job. Field experiences should provide opportunities and core experiences, such as leading change initiatives, professional development, teacher observation, and evaluation of staff (Anderson, 2017; Figueiredo-Brown, et al., 2015). Anderson (2017) continued by claiming that experiences should be done within the intense daily work of the principals and schools where the field experience occurred and not in the classroom. Failure to provide these types of authentic experiences in real-world environment curtailed the ability of the aspiring principal to integrate theory into practice and hence, limits their initial effectiveness as first-year principals (Pannell et al., 2015). Backor and Gordon (2015) agreed with these types of field experience opportunities in their recommendations of long-term and varied field experiences for aspiring principals. They claimed that through long-term and varied experience, the aspiring leader could immerse themselves in the observation and evaluation loop necessary for all principals. This recommendation by Backor and Gordon (2015) was in part due to initial interview data from recently exited principal preparation participants who stated, “we really didn’t do anything hands-on in the program, and I would like to see more of that...” (p. 116). Field experiences designed with multiple application experiences for the participants received the highest reviews from participants in preparation programs (Backor & Gordon, 2015).

Another area of essential field experience opportunity was with the school improvement process and visioning work within the experience. Just like a leadership

competency plan suggested by Cosner et al. (2015), a school must have a progress plan and vision that guided its work based on student growth and achievement data, as well as climate goals supported through discipline and equity data points. Jones and Ringler (2017) noted that an aspiring leader should be “immersed in the school’s improvement process and make a significant contribution to this vision and process as he/she refines his/her leadership skills” (p. 4). Further support for school improvement process planning was offered by Backor and Gordon (2015) who recommended field experiences in curriculum development and professional learning communities to sharpen the skill set of aspiring principals where it mattered most – the classroom.

Dodson (2015) outlined some of the most helpful field experiences in his report on the principal preparation programs of the seven most highly ranked education states in the United States. Listed among the most influential field experiences were interviewing and shadowing current school principals because these field experiences provided the aspiring principal the most authentic lens through which to view the job of principal. These types of experiences also allowed the aspiring principals the opportunity to talk with the current principal about best practices and approaches to leading instructional change and handling routine management issues. Leading faculty or parent meetings such as PTSA and Booster meetings was also noted by Dodson (2015a) as a high-value field experience due to the ability of the aspiring principal to engage with authentic tasks and put in practice theories learned in class around group dynamics and community relationship building. Some key field experience areas noted by recent principal preparation program graduates, as areas of greater need and opportunity, were financial/

budget, special education, English Learners, and school law (Davies, 2018; Dodson, 2015; Petty, 2016; Reeves & Van Tuyle, 2014).

Relation to National Standards

The alignment of national, state, and local principal standards and licensure requirements with principal preparation programs was critical to the overall development of principals and lends to the credibility and benefit of field experience programs for aspiring principals (Riley, 2018; Vogel & Weiler, 2014). Eight major educational research, policy, and representative organizations served as the primary drivers for ensuring that principal preparation programs, and the field experiences within those programs, were aligned to nationally recognized principal preparation standards (Friend & Watson, 2014; The Wallace Foundation, 2016). The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), The Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), The School Superintendent's Association (AASA), American Institutes for Research (AIR), and The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) served as the professional bodies that supported “high quality program models, including the provision of learning experiences that reflect the job of principal” (p. 16-17), and were coupled with standards-based principal preparation programs (The Wallace Foundation, 2016). Vogel and Weiler (2014) included the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) as another policy body

comprised of smaller school-based leadership organizations who offered and supported standards for aspiring leader programs.

These organizations required that some type of field experience component, based on the new Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and formally known as The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015), were integrated into principal preparation programs that wished to obtain national accreditation. The location of this case study uses the ISLLC standards as the foundation of their principal preparation program to include vision setting, school culture, school operations, community involvement, ethical behavior, and stakeholder input. With the advent of NCLB, ESSA, and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) over the past 10 years and a strong focus on standards-based outcomes, it was no surprise that field experiences for aspiring leaders were based on national and state professional school leader standards which focused on vision, ethics, equity, instructional leadership, community involvement, professional learning, school operations, and overall school improvement (Grissom, Mitani, & Woo, 2018; The Wallace Foundation, 2016). Studies noted the importance of a strong connection between universities, professional and policy organizations, and school districts to form stronger connections with the goal of building preparation programs and field experiences which encompassed the problems and issues today's principals faced in their schools (Henderson, Ruff, & Carjuzaa, 2015; Petty, 2016). Smith and Somers (2016) built on the idea of strong connections between policy and standard creators with school districts by recommending "leadership development projects" (p. 10) that incorporated real-world

principal practices based on national and locally accepted standards for principal preparation programs and field experiences. These projects were created with the goal to immerse aspiring principals in schools with experienced principals and develop a cadre of new principals who were familiar with the school district, its culture, and expectations for instruction and school operations.

A survey of superintendents in Indiana by Boyland, Lehman, and Shriver (2015) supported strong field experiences for aspiring principals in school operations, specifically fiscal management and budget creation due to the increasing complexity of school-based budgeting and grant funds being provided to schools. A study of Virginia principal preparation field experiences found that 100% of respondents felt that experiences involving finance and budget were needed because of the lack of daily work in this area by aspiring principals (Lynch, 2012; Robertson, 2007). Newly appointed principals in Kentucky who reflected on their field experiences offered that the two most important aspects of their field experiences were budget and finance and site-based decision making (Dodson, 2015). The Kentucky Department of Education (2013) specifically noted that field experiences in their state provided aspiring principals the opportunity to observe, participate, and lead across a range of experiences including standards outlined by the nation's leading principal preparation standards creators. Robertson (2007) found in his qualitative case study of principal preparation programs in Virginia that such programs, and field experiences within them, should be based on established standards which could be assessed and measured by school districts to assist in determining the readiness of aspiring principals for the role of principal.

Field experiences in states could go a step further in designing their programs to specifically target desired standards on outcomes to meet the needs of their state and/or local district (Taylor, Pelletier, Trimble, & Ruiz, 2014). Several states now require aspiring principals to participate in the state created anchor assessments at the end of their field experience to demonstrate competency across all principal preparation anchor standards within their states (Hearn, 2015; Hunt, Hood, Haller, & Kincaid, 2019; Vogel, Weiler, & Armenta, 2014). However, a study of Catholic School's principal preparation programs from Loyola University in Chicago by Morten and Lawler (2016) found that principal preparation programs should be based on standards and integrate field experiences that were focused on instructional leadership, working with divergent populations, and foster community engagement. Morten and Lawler (2016) recommended that Chicago area Catholic schools base their principal preparation and field experiences on The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) principal competencies which focused primarily on instructional leadership aspects of the principalship and minimized non-instructional standards and roles of the principal.

Relation to International Themes

Though the literature on international principal preparation programs was consistent that aspiring principal programs should offer programs that blend theoretical with practical experiences, no firm international standards are noted as benchmark standards for principal preparation programs or field experiences (Alhouti & Male, 2017; Gurr & Drysdale, 2015; Hogan, 2014; Vogel, 2015). However, consensus in the literature

related to international field experiences as part of principal preparation programs was the importance of providing authentic, real-world experiences for aspiring principals based on local expectations of the school or school district where the aspiring principal was being trained (Gurmu, 2019; Murakami, Tornsen, & Pollock, 2014; Ng, 2017).

Sumintono, Sheyoputri, Na Jiang, Misbach, and Jumintono (2015), who studied Indonesian principal preparation programs, indicated that the single most influential component of such programs was the ability of the participants to serve as deputy principals where they were immersed in the day-to-day activities of the schoolhouse and able to make authentic decisions that affected students daily. The ability to practice leadership skills was a common rationale for field experiences components within principal preparation programs across the United States' and international programs. Murakami et al. (2014) comparative document analysis reported similar findings in their three-country study of Sweden, Canada, and the United States that because of rapid changes in the role of principal due to technology, social media, school law, and student activism, aspiring principals must be able to learn within a field experience to apply their theoretical and classroom learning to actual practice. A study conducted in the Netherlands indicated that aspiring principals' ability to be innovative and reflective increased based on the level of quality and time spent in field experiences within schools (Hulsbos, Evers, & Kessels, 2015). Gurr and Drysdale (2015) identified seven themes or ideas that were common across eleven countries in all regions of the world. These common themes in principal preparation programs and related field experiences included active learning, connecting training to practice, identifying appropriate performance

standards, focusing on transitioning to leadership roles, leadership development, cultural competency, strengthening university-school district partnerships in principal preparation and field experience work for aspiring principals. These international themes carried similar trends from the new PSEL principal standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) and other regional, state, and local principal standards established in the United States where multiple standards focused on vision, culture, climate, instruction, school operations, community involvement, and equity.

Mentorship

The principalship continues to quickly evolve and requires a dizzying array of skillsets which not only need to be learned but practiced and refreshed as an aspiring principal prepares for the role of principal (Murakami, et al., 2014). The field experience plays a pivotal role in teaching and exposing aspiring leaders to the role of principal, but part of the field experience that the literature showed as critical to the ability of the aspiring leader to experience, reflect, practice, and learn the job of principal was the ability to have a highly qualified and experienced mentor principal guide them along the process of learning the job (Backor & Gordon, 2015; Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2018; Schechter & Firuz, 2015; Weiner & Burton, 2016; White, 2018). Mentorship provided the time and space for mentor principals to help shape the vision or ‘why’ an aspiring educator desired to become a principal. Schechter (2014) described this process as the mentor principal helping the mentee develop their vision (p. 377) that would assist the mentee in creating a professional personality that matched their vision with their personal traits, preferences, and leadership style. They also found that due to the importance and

power of the mentoring relationship, placement officials should pay attention to the communication, professional goals, and interpersonal styles of the mentor and mentee before placements were formally made. The role of the field experience mentor principal could be a recently retired principal or current principal; however, research indicated that the most important quality of the mentor principal should be one who had a proven record of success in leading a school and who best matched the qualities of the mentee (Taylor et al., 2014).

As the mentor-mentee relationship develops, the aspiring principal can engage in a learning cycle of application, reflection, and reapplication to hone not only their skill sets but develop their leadership and managerial style. Research conducted of Missouri aspiring principal field experience mentor-mentee relationships found that principals who were appropriately paired with an experienced principal were able to find first-year principal positions sooner than those who did not have a mentor during their field experience (Thomas et al., 2018). Additionally, the Catholic Principal Preparation program in the Chicago area Catholic schools specifically assigned a principal mentor to all aspiring leaders through the field experience component of their program (Morten & Lawler, 2016). The goal of this mentoring program was to discuss the application of the aspiring leader's coursework in the field experience while mentors also served as an advisor for challenges faced during the field experience by the aspiring leaders.

Another area where the mentoring cycle was strongly evident was in the clinical teacher supervision model that all new principals need to know as they begin the job of principal. Backor & Gordon (2015) reported in their study of professors, principals, and

teacher leaders that the implementation of the mentoring of aspiring leaders by experienced principals through the clinical teacher supervision model best allowed aspiring principals the ability to practice the process of evaluating teachers in the school setting. This component of the field experience allowed the aspiring principal to meet the teacher in the pre-observation meeting, observe the lesson, and then provide feedback to the teacher on the successful and growth areas of the lesson, while the mentor principal observed and guided the process where needed. The mentoring cycle then concluded with a deep discussion between the mentor and mentee on every facet of the observation process with a specific focus on where the mentee could reapply better practice on areas identified by the mentor principal. Leading these types of activities, and similar instructional focused activities like team meetings or grade level meetings was another opportunity for the mentor principal to debrief and model expectations for the aspiring principal (Bravender, 2018).

In Dodson's (2015) comprehensive qualitative study of seven state's principal preparation programs, including field experience requirements or components of the programs, he found that the highest rated component of the mentor-mentee relationship was the ability of the aspiring leader/mentee to observe or shadow an experienced principal/mentor conducting regular day-to-day activities in the schoolhouse. A Kentucky respondent in the study offered "work with [an] experienced school leader as mentor provided ongoing support and [the] opportunity to ask questions, observe, and test ideas" (p. 11), while a Mississippi respondent offered "I was fortunate to be in a situation where my mentor during this year-long program treated me as a [true] principal and expected

me to do that caliber of work.” (p. 11). Regardless of the area of the country or world where mentors worked with aspiring principal mentees, the benefits of these relationships better prepared aspiring principals for their first year as principals across visioning, instructional, operations, community, and relationship aspects of the job.

Social Justice

Ensuring high-quality leadership for all schools, particularly low-performing schools across the United States, is a significant social justice issue in education today. Universities and school districts across the nation are seeing this reality and redesigning principal preparation programs to meet the needs of a growingly diverse population in urban and suburban areas (Cunningham, VanGronigen, Tucker, & Young, 2018; DeMatthews, Kotok, & Serafini, 2019; Robey, Shi, & Savard, 2019). Evidence in the literature of this equity and cultural sensitivity inclusion was seen in states ranging from Florida, North Carolina, and Texas in the south, Illinois in the Midwest, and Montana in the west (Bosco, Floyd, Parker, & Riemer, 2018; Duke, 2014; Gooden & O’Doherty, 2015; Henderson, et al., 2015; Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014; Miller & Martin, 2014; Reeves & Van Tuyle, 2014).

East Carolina University (ECU) in North Carolina incorporated very specific theory and knowledge regarding school leadership and diversity topics into its principal preparation programs and field experiences (Figueiredo-Brown et al., 2015). This came about because of ECU faculty understanding that their principal preparation students needed to be able to address a more diverse student population, regardless of where they earned their first principalship. Two key components of ECU’s diversity principal

preparation program were providing students with a well-rounded curriculum that exposed them to a wide array of authors and points of view. Secondly, the pairing of the aspiring principals with mentor principals from schools with students representing a large variety of racial, ethnic, religious, language, and gender identity groups better prepared the aspiring principals to be the “agents of change” (p. 38) necessary to influence change in the social justice arena (Figueiredo-Brown et al., 2015).

Florida school personnel implement a turn-around program that targets low performing, high minority schools within the state to place the most effective new and experienced principals. A recent study of this program indicated that principals were acutely aware of the problems faced in low performing, high minority schools, but they were not able to articulate or understand why the problems existed that challenged the schools (Duke, 2014). Therefore, the Florida Department of Education implemented various courses of study in principal preparation programs across the state to expose aspiring principals to root cause analysis to assist them in applying their new learning into their field experience assignments. Duke also noted that aspiring principals in Florida, especially turn around specialists, must understand the context in which the school exists to have any chance to effect change in the school.

In Texas, where portions of the state continue to see a high number of Latino immigrants entering their schools, the need for principals of color is a high priority. However, Fernandez, Bustamante, Combs, and Martinez-Garcia (2015) indicated that aspiring principals of color face a higher level of scrutiny in their preparation program and field experience. This placed a higher premium on finding appropriate mentor

matches for aspiring principals of color in Houston area schools to promote the acceptance and promotion of aspiring principals of color. The study also found that local universities in the Houston area did a poor job in promoting social justice issues, such as racial diversity in school leadership; hence, placing the problem squarely with the local school districts. Related social justice issues addressed in principal preparation field experiences included working with English Language Learners (ELL) students across the country. In Illinois, this challenge led principal preparation program field experiences to include exposure to courses of study on the topic and pairing of effective principals who have experience working with large numbers of ELL students with aspiring principals throughout the state (Reeves & Van Tuyle, 2014). The benefit of these types of socially conscious field experiences built the capacity of these aspiring principals to lead schools of similar background throughout the state.

In Montana, educators faced a social justice issue surrounding Native American, i.e. Indian, students who saw very little of themselves not only in curriculum but also in school leadership. The Montana Department of Education led an effort identified as the Indian Leadership Education Development (ILEAD) project where Indian aspiring leaders were immersed in Indian studies and culturally relevant leadership pedagogy to prepare them to lead schools in Montana with high Indian populations or on reservations throughout the state (Henderson et al., 2015). A state cohort model was implemented based on a 324-hour field experience leadership instructional program with projects inclusive of each ISLLC standard. Indian aspiring leaders were paired with experienced, effective ILEAD graduates in the state to observe, shadow, and engage with the mentor

principal and his/her students, staff, and parents to better understand Indian educational issues. Educational leaders who developed the program and have participated in it believe that ILEAD allowed aspiring principals to become more self-aware and socially conscious leaders who would be more active in promoting Indian causes in their school communities (Henderson et al., 2015).

Similar social justice principal preparation field experience redesign was found to support Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer, Plus (LBGTQ+) populations. Unfortunately, the literature is very scant in this area of social justice and aspiring principal field experiences. O'Malley and Capper (2015) noted that research on this specific social justice area pales in comparison to the literature on racial and ethnic principal preparation programs in the United States; however, increasing awareness and education on this topic would require university and school districts to integrate more robust coursework and field experience exposure to prepare new principals for addressing students with gender or sexual identify questions.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature was robust on the topic of field experiences within principal preparation programs (Campbell & Parker, 2016; Cosner et al., 2015; Guerra et al., 2017; Gurr & Drysdale, 2015; Hackmann & Malin, 2016; Kearney & Valadez, 2015; Pannell et al., 2015; Thomas et. al., 2018); however, it was quite divided with respect to major themes of usefulness of field experiences and sources of information on the usefulness of field experiences. A common theme was found in the literature around best practices that should be included in field experiences as they were developed and implemented. First,

field experiences should be built on some form of local, state, or national standards to ground the field experience in research-proven strategies and best current and acceptable practice (Hearn, 2015; Vogel & Weiler, 2014). Several non-profit and governmental organizations, such as The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), The National Governor's Association (NGA), The Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), The School Superintendent's Association (AASA), American Institutes for Research (AIR), The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), and The Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), offered principal preparation and field experience standards that were readily available for universities or school districts to reference and implement to provide a method for evaluation of a program and student's efficacy throughout the program and field experience (Dodson, 2015; Morten & Lawler, 2016).

Though the literature was varied with respect to the types of activities that should be included in field experiences throughout multiple studies, including spending some amount of time in a schoolhouse during the school day to observe and work with an experienced principal and engaging in a mentoring relationship were two activities with high value by aspiring principals (Bush, 2016). In addition, practicing instructional leadership, working with faculty on visioning exercises, developing budget and finance reports, working with school community stakeholders such as the PTSA, and developing a sense of purpose and social awareness for the influence and importance of the principal

position in influencing student's lives were important factors in developing well rounded future principals (Bush, 2016; Larsen, 2016). In the field of education, specifically field experiences within principal preparation programs, the literature was clear that field experiences should have some role in the training of aspiring principals (Backor & Gordon, 2015; Johnson, 2016).

Dodson (2015a), in his seven-state study of field experiences and principal preparation programs, found that every state in his study had some form of field experience built into their principal preparation program. However, variance occurred in the areas of required components of the field experiences, the number of hours, and agreement among the participants on the most useful aspects of the field experience. For example, aspiring principals in Nebraska simply preferred more hours immersed in authentic field experiences, with one participant stating, "It needs to be more like student teaching-immersed in the position." (p. 13). Furthermore, participants in Maryland and Kentucky preferred more field experiences in the school budget and finance arena versus participants in Massachusetts who preferred more field experience work in teacher observation and evaluation.

Mentorship is a key factor in almost all professions, including medicine, law, construction trades, and most certainly education. The literature was replete with examples of how students, teachers, and administrators benefited from mentorship (Carara, Swanson, Van Kuren, & Zamudio, 2018). Mentorship, as part of the field experience component of principal preparation programs, was an essential element in allowing aspiring principals the opportunity to build their leadership vision, instructional

skills, and operational awareness for leading a schoolhouse. Being able to reflect, learn, and practice a wide variety of skill sets needed to be an effective principal, in a real-world setting of a functioning school, was one of the most effective field experience practices in education regardless of the persons' role in education but particularly for aspiring principals.

Social Justice awareness development for aspiring principals was a relatively new area of study within the literature with specific study on the topic only going back to the year 2000 with increasing studies through present times (Figueiredo-Brown et al., 2015; Gordon & Ronder, 2016; Miller & Martin, 2014; O'Malley & Capper, 2015). University and local district programs in urban and rapidly changing areas in the United States were recognizing the importance of more inclusive thinking and planning for aspiring principals and requiring field placements in schools with diverse backgrounds. In North Carolina, universities specifically designed their field experiences to expose aspiring leaders to students with varied demographics that include race, sexual orientation, and religions (Figueiredo-Brown et al., 2015). LBGTQ awareness, gender reassignment, and gender neutrality were topics with less study and knowledge in the education field. However, broad qualitative studies were providing evidence that principal preparation programs and field experiences were becoming more inclusive of these topics and training providing aspiring principals the experiences and opportunities to work with these students and the educators who work with them to better support them as they matriculate through the K-12 schooling system (O'Malley & Capper, 2015).

This case study focused on the beliefs of a broad range of participants, including superintendents, school system division leaders, aspiring principal program developers, field experience placement officials, and recent past participants of field experiences who are currently principals. This wide variety of participants presented a broader range of beliefs on the topic of field experience usefulness than is found in the current literature. Studies of field experiences, both nationally and internationally, were drawn from the beliefs of a more limited range of participants such as university professors, superintendents, and current principals (Vogel, 2014). This study addressed the lack of knowledge about the usefulness of a field experience component of an associate principal preparation program for assistant principals from the beliefs of a group of district-level educators and past participants of the program.

To include the broadest views from these participants, qualitative interviews were conducted with participants supported by coding and thematic analysis to determine major ideas to add to the global perceptions and literature. The inclusion of beliefs from recently appointed principals who participated in field experiences as part of their associate principal preparation program added a fresher belief on the usefulness of field experiences on their current practice as principals. Current literature on the topic sampled principals who had several years of experience, which may dilute their memory and beliefs offered during their interviews on the usefulness of field experiences. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and shared with the participants for review to ensure the accuracy of the data prior to coding and analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this case study was to explore the beliefs of system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program and examine archival data in order to analyze past participant beliefs regarding their current practices as principals to provide recommendations for the program. The lack of knowledge regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program served as the key problem for this study. This section includes the research design and rationale for choosing the design. The role of the researcher, participant and setting selection process, instrumentation used to collect data, and data analysis plan are described. Steps taken to establish trustworthiness and ethical procedures followed for the protection of participants were also included.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions addressed in this study were:

RQ1. What are the beliefs of system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of a principal preparation program?

RQ2. How do the current beliefs of principals who have participated in the principal preparation program compare to their beliefs at the time of completion of the program as described in archival data?

This bounded qualitative case study addressed a gap in knowledge and practice regarding the usefulness of field experiences in terms of the beliefs of system leaders and past participants who recently completed principal preparation field

experiences and are currently principals. Qualitative data included archival data from end-of-year surveys and interviews with system leaders and recent past participants who are currently principals. This study was best served by a bounded qualitative approach due to the need to gather beliefs and insights from participants of the study during a specific time and location (Merriam, 1998). Stake (1995) also supported a bounded system when a “specific, complex, integrated system has a boundary and working parts” (p. 2), particularly in social science research. A quantitative approach would not provide the level of rich details and participant beliefs needed to ascertain the usefulness of field experiences. Crawford, Burkholder, and Cox (2016) supported the use of qualitative studies when in-depth information is needed from participants, particularly through an interpretative lens of the researcher. Furthermore, due to a relatively small sample participant population, a qualitative design allowed me to construct meaning from the data and each subsequent interview (Crawford, Burkholder, & Cox, 2016).

A case study was the design most appropriate for this study because it involved an in-depth analysis of one case bounded by a specific location, phenomena, and multiple data sources (Yin, 2018). In addition, due to the relatively small geographic size of the study area and the limited number of study participants, a thorough and exhaustive process was initiated for data collection and analysis which provided a rich set of information for potential recommendations for the district’s program (Yin, 2018; Zainal, 2007). Baxter and Jack (2008) and Dawidowicz (2011) also noted that case studies were particularly useful for research-practitioners who wished to inform practice, make evidence-based recommendations, or simply improve a program, which was a

benefit for this study. Stake (1995), has clearly outlined how a well-designed qualitative case study can often be more rigorous than traditional studies using quantitative or mixed methods.

Case studies are a proven methodology for education-related studies where deep and rich analysis is needed to gather beliefs and opinions from those practicing in the field and the researcher possessed a strong interest in the field (Crawford, 2016; Dawidowicz, 2011; Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006; Stake, 1995). Schoch (2016) noted that case studies are particularly useful if a researcher wishes to determine if aspiring principals are able and prepared to take on the role of principal. A case study would be the ideal approach to this question because the researcher could interview aspiring principals within a bounded area and around a specific phenomenon of principal readiness. This example is very closely aligned to my study on field experience usefulness of aspiring principals from the belief of system leaders and recent past participants.

Other qualitative designs such as grounded theory, phenomenology, and participatory action research were not suitable designs for this study. Grounded theory design is rooted in developing a theory where one is lacking or where an existing theory may not be the most appropriate for the area of study because of the bounded nature where this study occurs. Phenomenological designs allow researchers to derive the meaning of the topic of study, which was not in alignment with the purpose and research questions for this study. The participatory action research design allows researchers and participants to be coresearchers to derive meaning and provide recommendations from

the data analysis, which was outside the bounds of gathering beliefs of participants on the usefulness of field experiences in the setting of the study (Crawford, Burkholder, & Cox, 2016). Though a quantitative approach would have provided statistical information and foundations for data analysis and reporting of results, participants' experiences, ideas, thoughts, and beliefs would have been limited with a survey tool or other quantifiable data collection instrument.

This case study design allowed for the gathering of data which in the case of this study included beliefs of superintendents, executive staff, principal supervisors, principal preparation program designers, recently appointed principals who have participated in the district's associate principal preparation program and affiliated field experiences, and archival end of course survey data from the associate principal preparation program. These varied beliefs allowed for triangulation of the data and overall strength of the case study (Dawidowicz, 2011; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Role of the Researcher

At the time of this study I am a member of the executive leadership team in the district where the case study took place. I supervise three executive directors for school support who supervise and are responsible for principals and day-to-day operations of the 64 schools within the district. The district has two other areas, led by two of my colleagues, which contained 104 schools across all grade levels. I had no role in the principal preparation program other than an occasional presentation and question and answer session with aspiring principals as part of their monthly coursework and meetings. I had no power relationships with any of the study's participants as each

interviewee is an executive level colleague or principal outside of my area and evaluative supervision. I ensured that all participants understood that their participation in the study was voluntary and they were able to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. I collected, transcribed, analyzed, and reported on the data. Documentation was recorded and stored.

As a former principal, current colleague of the participants, and interviewer for the study, bias was a continual factor to manage as data were collected, analyzed, and reported in this study. As a former principal, I needed to set aside my formal principal training and preparation and remain open to new ideas and strategies implemented in the principal preparation program within the case study, participant interviews, and review of the archival data. Though no power relationships existed between me and the study participants, as a colleague I needed to maintain objectivity in terms of data being gathered and beliefs of the participants regardless of my professional relationships with them or length of time having them as colleagues. To manage bias throughout the study, the interview questions were open-ended and reviewed by a peer not involved in the study to ensure that the interview questions were aligned with the research questions, allowed participants to respond with little limitations, and identified any researcher bias (Chenail, 2011; Crawford, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The study was conducted within my own work environment. Confidentiality and informed consent were also significant ethical considerations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Methodology

The school district in this case study was in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The district was considered a large suburban-urban district with over 100,000 students, 150 schools, and 15,000 employees. For the past 5 years, district personnel have implemented its own designed principal preparation program where approximately 20 to 30 aspiring principals apply and are selected to participate in a year-long principal preparation program, which included a four-week field experience. The aspiring principals had the opportunity in the last portion of the program to shadow an assigned principal mentor and engage in an embedded field experience where they were temporarily assigned as the principal of a school where the permanent principal was given a temporary alternate assignment.

Due to the nature of this bounded case study, purposeful sampling was used to ensure that each participant was able to offer high value and specific beliefs on the usefulness of the field experience component of the district's principal preparation program. Purposeful sampling allowed for a deep focus on the phenomenon of the case study, related participants, and artifacts relevant to the usefulness of field experiences within the district's principal preparation program (Schoch, 2016). Lastly, purposeful sampling allowed for variance among the participants, which helped in fully answering the research questions of the study (Patton, 2002).

Participant Selection

The participants for this study were selected based on their experience with the district's associate principal preparation program and current position within the district

which provided a unique belief on the usefulness of the field experience of the associate principal preparation program. Some participants in the study recently completed participation in the preparation program; hence, provided rich data on the usefulness of the field experience compared to their current role as principal. The remaining participants were current executive leaders in the district who maintained various levels of responsibility in creating, implementing, participating or benefitting from the district's principal preparation program. Participants were identified as meeting these criteria based on their job title and position within the district of the case study. Participants had the titles of principal, executive director, chief, or superintendent in their job title. These titles denoted the level of knowledge necessary from a system and school-based belief needed for this study as each participant either participated in the preparation program or had been involved with it over the last four years. The number of participants expected to be interviewed for this study was approximately 12. Similar studies with participation numbering approximately a dozen individuals were identified in the beliefs of principal preparation participants and program developers (Anderson, 2017; Hackmann & Malin, 2016). Small sample sizes in qualitative case studies are typical due to the focused and in-depth nature of case study design (Schoch, 2016). In addition, the flexibility afforded to case study designs allowed for smaller sample populations to allow the researcher to delve deeply into the phenomenon, or case, being studied (Creswell, 2018; Dawidowicz, 2011; Yin, 2018; Zainal, 2007).

Instrumentation

I served as the primary research instrument for this study using a researcher-produced interview guide containing opening comments, interview questions, and closing comments for each interview (Appendix A). The guide also included space for field notes during each interview. The interview instrumentation for the study was created from a series of interview guides developed by Walden University (2016, 2016a, 2016b) and used in various courses of study by Walden University. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for later coding and reference. De-identified end-of-course archival participant survey data kept by the district was reviewed to gain beliefs of the principal preparation participants on the field experience component of the preparation program. These data were available for all five years of the program from the district where the case study occurred (Appendix E). Clarity and content of the instrument were established by the creation of a draft of the instrument and then having a program colleague and doctoral committee members provide a qualitative review and input on the instrument. Feedback was then incorporated into the instrument for final use in semistructured interview data collection (McKenzie, Wood, Kotecki, Clark, & Brey, 1999). Content validity was established in multiple ways including the selection of a sample group that was truly knowledgeable of the study's focus areas, triangulation of data by using interview and archival data to support results from different perspectives, as well as reaching saturation in the literature review on the topic.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment. Participants were initially contacted and recruited by me via email request to meet and discuss the case study. All the non-principal participants were employed within the case study district and had offices on the same campus as mine. All principals in the study were also employed in the case study district. Names of the participants were gathered from existing public employee databases in the case study district.

Participation. In this initial meeting, I shared and described a standard letter of participation and consent, which summarized the study, IRB approval information, and their rights as participants of the study. I then answered any questions they had about the study or their participation within the study and asked them if they wished to have time to consider participation. If they did, I scheduled a follow-up communication to confirm their participation and process for signing and delivering their signed consent form. If the participants agreed at the initial meeting to participate, I asked them to sign the participation and consent form and securely stored the form in my records. An interview date was then scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and location.

Data Collection. Interviews were conducted in a private meeting space at times that were mutually convenient to the interviewee and me. Interviews were scheduled for one-hour; however, most only took 30 to 45 minutes based on the depth of responses and beliefs provided by the participants. One primary interview took place with each participant with the option to engage in follow-up interviews with participants if more data were needed or offered by the participants. Data from the interviews were recorded

on a digital audio recorder and on a field notes section of the interview guide (Appendix A). Field notes were focused on impressions from each of the interviews. I transcribed the audio recordings and asked each participant to review the transcript for accuracy before I began analysis. Qualitative data software was utilized to organize the data collected in preparation for data analysis.

Following each interview, participants were thanked for their participation and informed of their right to review the transcript of their interview and make any necessary edits, clarifications, or follow-up on any information provided in the initial interview. Participants were provided their de-briefing information via email, in-person, or a follow-up interview. Once each participant had an opportunity to review their transcript and offer edits if needed, the data were coded, and a full data analysis protocol ensued.

Archival documents provided by the case study district from the past four years with end-of-course numeric and descriptive feedback from principal preparation participants were analyzed for their comments related to the usefulness of the field experience portion of their preparation program. These data were then integrated into questions for current principals who participated in the program within the past three years to gather their current beliefs on the usefulness of the field experience component compared to when beliefs were gathered at the end of the course to address the second research question of this study. The total set of data provided a complete picture of beliefs from past participants, current principals who participated in the preparation program, and executive level staff on the usefulness of the field experience component within the district's associate principal preparation program.

Data Analysis Plan. Data analysis consisted of interview transcripts and document reviews with open coding and thematic analysis based on the guidelines established by Creswell (2018), Ravitch and Carl (2016), Saldana (2016), and Guba (1981). Analytic memos and notes from the interviews and archival document analysis were also conducted. Similarly, first cycle open coding and thematic analysis of specific words, phrases, and sentences that were particularly relative to social change were highlighted in this phase of data analysis. Following first cycle coding, identified phrases and sentences were transferred to a coding sheet where categories and themes were determined for further data analysis. Developing findings was accomplished by consistently relating all data analysis back to the research questions to support a focused and convergent analysis of the data (Yin, 2018; Baxter & Jack, 2008). A comparative reporting of the data, to include the beliefs of central office leaders as well as participants' beliefs of the principal preparation program directly after completion of the program and after becoming a principal, were completed to form the foundation for recommendations from the study (Yin, 2018). Discrepant data were used for seeking alternative understandings and relations to the research questions as well as updating interview questions as interviews progress (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

Trustworthiness

Credibility

The creation of trustworthy research results begins with establishing credibility (Shenton, 2004) within the methodology of the overall project and specifically the data collection. I used an inductive process to generate categories from codes (specific

observations) and themes from categories (Barret, Choi, & Li, 2011). Generalizing, or the use of inductive logic to generalize these concepts to themes and relating the themes to the research questions, not only established credibility but also allowed me to discover social change implications of the data as prescribed for all students engaged in research at Walden University (Walden University, 2017).

Transferability

Transferability was achieved by providing a rich description of the data collected through interviews and archival data analysis. As noted by Shenton (2004) “a thick description of the phenomena under study” (pg. 12) is necessary to provide deep roots in the data analysis and reporting of the data. In addition, the selection of a wide variety of participants from different offices and responsibilities within the case study district provided a spectrum of beliefs on the phenomena being studied. Participants were selected across three different divisions and offices within the district. By using a deliberate inductive approach to analyze the data and establish the context of the study within the research question, transferability was achieved for future research on field experiences within principal preparation programs.

Dependability

Triangulation of the data was critical towards establishing the dependability of the study. This was achieved by comparing data gathered from interviews with data gathered from documents and archival data from the district’s principal preparation program. Transcript reviews were used to ensure accurate collection of interview data where interviewees were provided the opportunity to review transcripts of their respective

interviews and offer edits or the opportunity to be interviewed again. Member checks also occurred where interviewees reviewed the initial interpretations of their data to check that none of the information provided was misconstrued by me. Lastly, saturation in the literature review was reached to include seminal works and the most recent five years of research on the topic of field experiences within principal preparation programs.

Confirmability

Confirmability was established through consistent reflexive practice, memo writing, and recognition of my personal bias', beliefs, and assumptions related to the topic of field experiences within principal preparation programs (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While engaged in data collection and analysis, I constantly was mindful of my role as a researcher and any personal thoughts on the topic as to mitigate those thoughts and keep an open mind and allow myself the ability to change beliefs and adapt to what the data revealed. Peer-debriefing also occurred with an uninvolved third party to allow me to confirm interpretations and coding of the data as well as ensure that the development and implications of data were accurate (Guba, 1981).

Ethical Procedures

Significant ethical issues were possible with this study as I am a colleague with the participants I interviewed. To properly manage the potential ethical and bias issues that could have arisen through this process, I maintained and reviewed my interview notes, wrote analytic memos, and retained as much formality through the process as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Due to the nature of the cohort I participated in through Walden University, approval had been granted by Walden University's IRB specifically

for case study research with adults only (02-13-19-0752413). Additionally, IRB approval by the case study district was also granted (RP 2433). Treatment of human participants was done in accordance with the landmark Belmont Report (1974) where study participants were formally and thoroughly advised of their rights before, during, and after the study.

No ethical concerns were anticipated with the recruitment of participants as they were all current colleagues; however, I ensured that each participant was aware that they did not need to participate simply because I am a colleague of theirs. Informed consent was another ethical consideration faced in this study and requirement of any research study as a critical component of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes. Informed consent was gathered by obtaining and maintaining signed consent forms as prescribed by Walden University and school district IRB and outlined the major parameters of the study, the rights of the participants to review their interview data, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Though no power relationships were part of this study, participants needed to freely participate in the study because of interest in the topic and potential value in findings for the district. To guard against a participant wishing not to participate or withdraw early from the study, I maintained a secondary list of possible participants whom I could have approached with a request to participate. Another option was to adjust my participant sampling strategy to chain sampling and ask a current participant whom they would recommend participating in the study based on their knowledge of the study and intended outcomes.

Because data were gathered from colleague interviews and review of archival district data, confidentiality was the most significant ethical concern of the study with respect to the treatment of the data. A breach of confidentiality by the researcher threatens the integrity and ethical standards of study, as well as the researcher (Jones, 1995). Confidentiality was maintained by keeping all data and notes secured in a locked location within my home and password protected on my computer and all ancillary storage devices such as external drives. Names of all the participants were substituted with pseudonyms to protect their identities and no identifying data will be used in the archival data analysis or findings. Due to the relatively small sample population and location of the case study, it was crucial to protect the participants identity and related data to ensure full participation, disclosure, and belief sharing. All data were stored on password protected computers or flash drives. All documentation was secured in locked desks at my home to provide an extra layer of data protection. The research was not be conducted until final IRB approval by Walden University and the school district (RP 2433) of the proposal phase of this study was received.

Summary

This chapter included details related to the design and rationale for the study. A qualitative case study design was chosen for this study because of the need for a rich description of the phenomena from the beliefs of various participants identified in the case study district. The role of the researcher was described with supporting analysis of potential power differentials and applicable ethical considerations. A thorough description of the methodology was included in the chapter to illustrate how and why

participants were selected for the study along with detailed accounting and rationale for the use of the study's data collection instrumentation. A detailed data analysis plan was offered to describe the foundation for how interviews and archival data would be analyzed in the study. Subsequent explanations for trustworthiness and ethical procedures concluded the chapter. Chapter 4 will include the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

In Chapter 4, I provide a critical analysis of interview and archival survey data collected during my research. The purpose of this case study was to explore the beliefs of system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of an associate principal preparation program, along with the examination of archival data to analyze past participant beliefs regarding their current practice as principals to provide recommendations for the program. The research questions addressed in this study were:

RQ1: What are the beliefs of system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of a principal preparation program?

RQ2: How do the current beliefs of principals who have participated in the principal preparation program compare to their beliefs at the time of completion of the program as described in archival data?

This chapter includes the setting of the study, data collection and analysis methods, and results. A description of evidence of trustworthiness is also included in this chapter.

Setting

I interviewed nine system leaders and three principals who were past participants of the associate principal preparation program within one large suburban-urban school district in the mid-Atlantic region for this study. The associate principal program is an 8-month program for 20 selected assistant principals. These assistant principals meet once a month for classroom-based instruction regarding principal preparation topics including instruction, curriculum, business services, and community relations. As part of the

program, a field experience is required that places each associate principal into a level-appropriate school with the principal of that school serving as the mentor of the associate principal. The field experience is comprised of two parts, a 2-week shadowing and a 2-week individual leadership session where the associate principal takes over as the school's principal. The permanent principal is reassigned for that 2-week period to other duties within the district.

The district has over 100,000 students with approximately 55% of students being students of color or self-identified as mixed race. Economically disadvantaged students account for approximately 45% of the total student population. The district contains urban, suburban, and rural areas with various types of housing including apartments, condominiums, single family homes, and farms. Student achievement according to state-reported data, is mixed across subgroups with only White and Asian students meeting standards for mathematics and Asian, Black, Latino, and White students meeting standards in English Language Arts across the tested grade bands.

Two of the system leaders interviewed for this study have been with the district for less than 5 years and seven of the system leaders have been with the district for at least 20 years. The positional stability of the system leaders led to rich and deep perspectives from these participants. The principals interviewed in the study have been principals for 2 to 3 years and participated in the associate principal program within the same timeframe. The principals have served in the same school since participating in the associate principal program and have only served as principal of one school at the time of their interviews. One principal from each level of school (elementary, middle, high) was

interviewed to ensure a well-rounded collection of perspectives from principals who participated in field experiences within the associate principal program prior to their appointment as principals in the district.

The associate principal program has not undergone any significant changes in the past 5 years which would influence any of the participants' perspectives, nor interpretation of the data. The field experience components and goals of the program have remained consistent since the inception of the associate principal program. The only measurable change in the program has been the size of the cohort admitted to the program over the past 5 years; however, this did not have any influence on the participants or interpretation of the data at the time of the study.

Rachel is a system leader who has been with the district for less than 5 years. In her current role, she designs and provides building level and central office administrators with professional learning opportunities in all aspects of leadership development. Prior to joining the district, she worked in other districts with similar student demographics as the study district as a teacher and central office administrator.

Helen is a system leader who has been with the district for 20 years. Most recently, she worked on the design and implementation of leadership development programs for school level and central office administrators. Prior to serving in this capacity, she worked for other educational agencies and professional organizations in leadership development. Earlier in her career, she served as a teacher, activity sponsor, and building level administrator. She has a strong passion for leadership development and provides training in this area at a national level.

Chrissy is a system leader who has been with the district for 24 years. She works directly with current and aspiring principals in an evaluative, coaching, and supporting role. In this position, she is acutely able to assess the needs of new principals as they prepare and assume their new roles. Prior to serving in her current role, she worked in other educational agencies in similar leadership development positions. As a former principal, assistant principal, and principal in large suburban-urban districts, she has rich perspectives regarding principal preparation experiences for the district's aspiring principals.

Bob is a system leader who has been with the district for 25 years. He works directly with current and aspiring principals in an evaluative and coaching role. In this position, he offers direct support and supervision to principals and offers leadership succession counsel to aspiring principals. In previous positions, he took part in the design and implementation of leadership succession and principal preparation programs. In addition, he served as a building level administrator, which included the roles of assistant principal and principals at the secondary level. He possesses a high level of experience, expertise, and passion for field experiences.

Sue is a system leader who has been with the district for 23 years. She works indirectly with principals in a supporting role as part of the implementation of various non-instructional aspects within their schools. In previous roles within the district, she has served as a principal supervisor, principal coach, principal, and assistant principal. She is very familiar with the expectations of new principals and has provided input regarding field experience and placement of principal interns within schools.

Kim is a system leader who has been with the district for less than 5 years. She works directly with current and aspiring principals in an evaluative and coaching role. She also works directly with staff on implementing leadership succession programs and is in the position to provide input regarding principal placements within the district. She regularly visits associate principal participants as they are engaged in their field experiences and provides feedback to them and program implementors regarding their successes and growth areas. She has worked in several large suburban-urban districts as a central office administrator, principal, and assistant principal at the elementary and middle school level.

Carrie is a system leader who has been with the district for 27 years. She works directly with current and aspiring principals in an evaluative and coaching role. In previous roles within the district, she was part of the team that designed and implemented initial principal preparation and field experiences for aspiring principals. She holds a strong passion for principal leadership and provides feedback on the program to develop and maintain effective field experiences for all participants. She was a former assistant principal and principal at the elementary and middle school level.

Steve is a system leader who has been with the district for 26 years. He works directly with school and central office administrators on various forms of professional learning, including the associate principal program. He was part of the team which designed and implemented the associate principal program and field experience component. Before serving in this position, he served as an assistant principal and principal in various elementary schools.

Jim, Lisa, and Katherine are system principals who have been with the district for over 15-years. Each of them has been a principal between 1-3 years. They each have experience in the district as classroom teachers, school-based leaders, assistant principals, and each was a past participant in the district's yearlong Associate Principal preparation program, which included a field experience component.

Victoria is a system leader who has been with the district for 24 years. She works as a senior executive who works directly with other executive staff in designing and implementing programs across all aspects of the district. A portion of her current work includes recommendations for principal appointments and assessing the readiness for aspiring principals. Her perspective on the usefulness of field experiences on principal preparation should provide rich detail. Before serving in this position, she served in various central office roles as well as an assistant principal and principal in various elementary schools.

Data Collection

I interviewed 12 participants, nine system leaders with knowledge of the associate principal program and related field experiences and three principals who participated in the program within the past two to three years. Data collected from archival sources represented approximately 75 participants who participated in the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program with the district over the past four years. Deidentified archival end-of-course survey data for the past four years was provided to me by the district in hard copy format at one time. All interview data were collected in a private meeting room to ensure the confidentiality of the participant's

identity and information shared. The participants each chose a private meeting room convenient to their home or work location. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes with all interviews occurring on the original scheduled date and time. No follow-up interviews were necessary for this study as each interview provided a robust amount of data. The interviewing of all participants took place over a 3-week timeframe to accommodate participants' work and private life schedules.

I emailed interview invitations to all participants using their publicly available email addresses of record. The email contained the information in the Leader Consent Form, which provided each participant with a broad overview of the study and their rights if they chose to participate. Participants were provided the opportunity to ask me any questions about the study prior to consenting. All participants agreed to participate in the study, and none had any initial questions prior to being interviewed. Each participant sent a confirmation email to me agreeing to be part of the study, which was kept in a password protected electronic file to protect their true identify and ensure confidentiality.

After receiving the participants' confirmation emails agreeing to participate in the study, I sent a follow-up email to schedule the individual interviews at a mutually agreed upon time and location with deference given to the participants' choice of private meeting room and time. Prior to each interview, each participant signed a paper copy of the consent form and provided verbal recorded consent. All electronic, hard copy, and audio recorded consents are securely stored in locked desks or password protected electronic files. Other than the initial study invitation email and scheduling of interviews,

no other communication occurred between me and the participants regarding the study prior to the interviews.

All interviews were recorded using an Olympus digital voice recorder and a recorder app on my cell phone, Speechnotes, which allowed all interviews to be transcribed automatically in Word and PDF format. Two digital recording devices were used as a precautionary method to guard against accidental erasing or misplacement of one of the digital recordings or devices. After each interview, I listened to the recording for clarity and to update my personal notes of the interview. I then used the app and audio recordings to transcribe each interview and listened to the interview a second time to ensure that the transcription accurately captured the audio recording. This process also allowed me to correct any minor errors in the transcription and become more familiar with the content of the interview for more reliable data analysis later in the study. The transcriptions of all interviews totaled 45 pages of single-spaced text.

For each interview, the participants were asked the same questions, for the exception of the principals who were asked an additional question(s) based on their participation in the field experience component of the associate principal program (Appendix A). Additional probe questions were asked of each participant based on their responses and my need to gather more detailed information on certain themes which emerged over the course of the 12 interviews. Each interview concluded with me thanking each interviewee for their participation in the study and reminding them that they would have the opportunity to member check their interview transcripts for making any edits or corrections they felt were needed to their interview responses. No

participants provided any edits or corrections to their transcripts after conducting their respective member checks. Table 1 displays the location, frequency, and duration for each interview.

Table 1

Location, Frequency, and Duration of Each Participant Interview

Participant	Location	Frequency	Duration
Rachel	Private Room	One interview	27 minutes
Helen	Private Room	One interview	35 minutes
Chrissy	Private Room	One interview	37 minutes
Bob	Private Room	One interview	29 minutes
Sue	Private Room	One interview	44 minutes
Kim	Private Room	One interview	29 minutes
Carrie	Private Room	One interview	31 minutes
Steve	Private Room	One interview	37 minutes
Jim	Private Room	One interview	28 minutes
Lisa	Private Room	One interview	32 minutes
Katherine	Private Room	One interview	36 minutes
Victoria	Private Room	One interview	41 minutes

No significant variations in data collection as described earlier in this study were encountered except for the number of audio recording devices used for the interviews. I purchased a new audio recording device for conducting the interviews; therefore, in the process of learning how to use the device, I met with some challenges around saving and accessing sample recordings. Therefore, though I felt comfortable using the new audio recording device, I felt it prudent to use a back-up audio recorder to ensure no data were

lost during the interview or in later stages of data analysis. In addition, the audio recording app on my cell phone had the capability to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews automatically, which proved to be a significant time and cost saver in collecting and analyzing the interview data. No unusual circumstances were encountered during any stage of the data collection process.

Data Analysis

After all the interviews were completed, the audio recordings were reviewed and assigned a password-protected code on the digital recorder. I listened to each recorded interview once to determine the sound quality and ensure the recording was clear and easy to understand. I also recorded each interview on a transcription app, Speechnotes, on my cell phone as a back-up to the audio recording. I assigned a password-protected code to each transcribed interview on Speechnotes as a precaution to accidental deletion of any portion of the audio recording and as an alternative means to confirm that the transcriptions were accurate. I then transcribed each interview and provided a copy of the transcription to each respective participant for their review and edits, if necessary. The participants were asked to provide edits or confirm that no edits were needed. All participants found their transcripts to be an accurate representation of their interviews.

Open coding with thematic analysis was used for data analysis as described by Creswell (2018), Ravitch and Carl (2016), and Guba (1981). Each participant's name was substituted with a pseudonym to protect their identity and allow for attributable quotes in later sections of this dissertation. I transcribed verbatim each interview and organized them in Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. I also used word pattern recognition

software to assist in identifying specific terms used most frequently in the transcripts as well as the archival end-of-course open-ended responses by former program participants. The notes, analytic memos, and transcripts from each interview and archival data survey responses were used in an inductive approach to identify codes, categories, and themes from specific words, phrases, and responses to interview questions and provided in the archival survey data. Any results, as explained in the next section, from these codes, categories, and themes were then related directly to the research questions to support a focused and convergent analysis of the data (Yin, 2018; Baxter & Jack, 2008). Recommendations reported later in this study were also based on a comparative analysis of data between central office leaders and current principals who participated in the field experience component of the associate principal program (Yin, 2018).

The following table describes the codes, categories, and themes identified in my analysis. Themes that emerged from the data analysis included experiential, reflective leadership, challenges, strong relationships, and empowered leaders and growth.

Table 2

Codes, Categories, and Themes Used in Data Analysis

Codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-the-job training • Coach • Mentor • Action • Exploration • Engagement • Practical • Hands-on • Comprehensive • Participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usefulness • Hands-on • Participatory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiential
<i>table continues</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain knowledge • Observations • Feedback • Reflections • Instructional leadership • Community outreach • Relationships • Strategize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most beneficial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical tasks • Non-instructional tasks • Time of field experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Least beneficial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-evaluative • Feedback • Critical • Thought partner • Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful • Strong relationships • Instructional leaders • Intentional • Confident • Proficient • Growth mindset • purposeful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics of current principals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered leaders and growth

Data analysis included printing all copies of the transcripts and highlighting codes

aligned to the two primary research questions (RQ) and probing questions (PQ). In

addition, I used my interview notes to further identify codes to generate categories and identify major themes of the data. I also reviewed key quotes from the interviews to compare the data to identify codes, categories, and themes from the data. Major categories identified for RQ 1 included usefulness, hands-on, and participatory, which are all aligned to the constructivist conceptual framework of the study. Kim described the usefulness of the field experience as “essential and incredibly useful”

while participant 1 noted, “it is important to serve in the trenches and participate in all aspects of the school during the field experience.” The major category for PQ1 was the most beneficial aspects of the field experiences, which was highlighted by Steve when he noted, “providing feedback around instruction as the number one thing to do as an administrator during the field experience.” PQ2 was the least beneficial aspect of the field experiences, which included Sue noting, “any non-instructional tasks like running a fire drill or supervising lunch duty were not essential because they were already roles of the assistant principal.” PQ3 included the mentoring benefits of the field experiences as the major category as highlighted by Helen who shared, “the importance of mentoring allows the associate principal to discover their “why” and develop their purpose in preparation for the role of principal.”

RQ2 major category was characteristic of current principals who participated in the associate principal program within the past 1 to 3 years. Katherine, a current principal who participated in the program, noted, “to this day, I take 5-10 minutes to make major decisions as a result of what I learned from my mentor and my field experience.” Jim shared that the field experience, “helped me learn that I did not need to learn everything

to be an effective principal.” Archival survey data from participants over the past 4 years also was included to assist in the identification of codes, categories, and themes across all research and probing questions.

No discrepant cases needed to be addressed as all interviews and archival data contributed to the results and conclusions of the study. However, some discrepant responses were provided on the time of year of the field experiences. The associate principal program scheduled field experiences for a specific time of the school year due to district budget and school coverage restraints; however, some participants felt that associate principals miss out on specific experiences such as school opening/closing experiences as well as budget creation and specific staff professional development opportunities because the field experiences are scheduled outside of those windows.

Results

The results from the interviews with twelve participants are summarized below. Codes and themes that emerged in the data are included below. Quotes from the interviews are also used to illustrate results.

Data for RQ1

RQ1: What are the beliefs of system leaders and past participants on the usefulness of the field experience component of the principal preparation program?

Interview responses, as well as review of archival data and interviews of past participants, provided data to answer this question. I found consistent responses around the experiential nature and usefulness of the field experience from all participants. A

slightly modified version of this question was asked of current principals who participated in the study who participated in the field experience. Their beliefs are noted in the following sections.

Beliefs of system leaders. System leaders used words and phrases such as on-the-job training, action, hands-on, participatory, engaging, exploratory, and comprehensive to describe the overall usefulness of the field experience within the district. Specifically, Kim noted, “associate principals have the opportunity to participate in various principal roles that they would not normally have an opportunity to participate in as assistant principals.” Rachel further noted, “I think it’s very important for aspiring principals to actually be in the field, in the work, and in the trenches in the context of the school.” Participants felt that engaging in field experiences where the associate principal could experience as many principal roles as possible during their field experience time was what provided the most useful component of the year-long preparation program. Carrie noted, “it is important to engage future leaders as aspiring principals”, while Helen noted, “the opportunity to engage in special education issues, budget decisions, and instructional leadership opportunities provides very useful areas of growth for the associate principal.”

However, some discrepant interview responses from system leaders did reveal that the overall usefulness of the field experience would be greater if clearer goals were established for the field experiences at the beginning of the preparation program. Carrie noted,

The field experience could be tightened up a bit through goal setting for the person in the program, creating a document that aligns to the principal standards

(PSELS). Currently, the field experience may not be structured well-enough to develop leadership competencies around what it means to be a change agent and related goals. It may be helpful to develop a mini school progress plan with leadership competencies as the foundation of the document for the associate principals.

Additional results later in this section from former participant interviews and archival data support this system leader's belief that a more structured, goal setting approach may provide more useful field experience for the associate principal.

Beliefs of past participants and archival participant data. When asked for their beliefs on the usefulness of their previous field experiences in preparing to become principals, past participants revealed similar positive beliefs around the usefulness of their field experiences as system leaders. Katherine noted,

The field experience was very useful to me as a sitting principal. My mentor principal provided me with a lot of information that I still use as a sitting principal. Without the field experience, the program would have just been another professional development opportunity, instead, it provided me with useful information to move forward in my career. One major take away from the field experience that I rely on as a sitting principal is not to make emotional decisions.

Archival end-of-course data from the program showed a consensus that the field experience was a positive experience, with anecdotal comments including, "It was an amazing experience", "an experience that all leaders can benefit from", and "a great way

for me to build relationships with current and future colleagues”. Another former participant and current principal, Jim noted,

The regular assistant principal role does not prepare them for the principalship. The way the job is now it does not prepare you for how much your system principals must do. You have responsibilities being in the program that really kind of got my feet wet it. I had to make those decisions, or I had to be able to find those resources. I had to communicate a vision to the staff and help them understand why because I had to make a change.

Experiential learning continued to be a strong theme throughout the various pieces of data collected and reviewed. However, Lisa, a current principal, noted some discrepant data around the usefulness of the overall program as she reflected on her time as a participant. She noted,

I thought it was certainly useful to some degree. It feels a little contrived given the time. It really is very dependent on when the person goes through it as to what they get to see about principal preparation. Of course, as an assistant principal, you don't really get to experience staffing. You are always getting ready for testing or getting ready for something else, so it's always a bad time. If the assistant principal wasn't assigned to the program when those things were happening, then they probably still did not get exposure to it.

Though this Lisa's beliefs were not as positive on the overall usefulness of the field experience, she still believed that there was a benefit in experiencing some aspects of the

field experience, in her case the staffing process, based on what time of year the experience was held in the school.

Data for PQ1

Probing question 1 as it related to RQ1 was as follows: What field experiences do you believe as the most important and why? Interview responses, as well as review of archival data and interviews of past participants, provided data to answer this question. I found a wide range of responses for the most important, and the data analysis revealed four that were common experiences between system leaders, past participants, and archival data and an overall theme of reflective leadership as the most common benefit between all study participants.

Beliefs of system leaders. Among the most highly regarded experiences noted by system leaders were experiences that allowed the attainment of new knowledge by the associate principal, the time to reflect individually and with the mentor principal, the opportunity to participate in community outreach activities with the school, and the multiple daily chances to strategize new solutions to new problems. System leaders believed that field experiences such as observing instruction, leading post-observation conferences, leading data dialogues, facilitating parent and community meetings, and developing short-term solutions to problems faced during the field experience were the best experiences to prepare associate principals for the role of principal. Sue summarized these beliefs by noting,

The building of instructional leadership capacity and working with other district and school leaders, allows participants to gain knowledge that they would not

have been able to gain from working in one school. They develop key relationships to build and sustain programs within a school. Because we are such a large system, the ability to meet various leaders throughout the field experience is critical because when they need help as a principal, they know whom to call.

Helen provided a unique, almost discrepant, belief around the most beneficial experience for associate principals when she noted, “unplanned events are the best experiences because the unplanned events allow the associate principals to reach out to colleagues and helps them overcome isolation.” Helen was the only system leader to explicitly mention unplanned events, but unplanned events and the ability to address them and seek support in addressing them was noted by current principals who participated in the field experience. Instructional leadership and community outreach experiences were shared as some of the most beneficial experiences, particularly by Steve who noted,

Having to interact with a parent community because very often your internship is different from your own and you might not have had that experience, so we really push people to have that experience. We also ask them to engage in staff development and, even if it's not in a formal evaluation setting, to provide feedback around instruction. First, it's the number one thing you should be doing as an administrator, but that sets up an experience that you're going to be expected to do as soon as you get your principalship.

Beliefs of past participants and archival participant data. When asked for their beliefs on the most beneficial field experiences of their previous field experiences in preparing to become principals, past participants revealed experiences which allowed

reflection, community outreach and opportunity to gain new knowledge as the most beneficial. Lisa noted, “parent interactions and the creation of a strong sense of responsibility of being a principal emphasized through the field experience were the most important to me.” Jim concurred when he noted, “the greatest value in the experience was the new learning from daily activities and interactions with staff.” Archival data from past participants reflected the most beneficial field experiences to be those times when associate principals had time to reflect and learn from their mistakes. A piece of archival data from a past participant revealed,

My time with the lead principal was invaluable and I enjoyed the opportunity to shadow him as much as possible during the field experience. Thought that was not a formal experience, just being able to walk with him throughout the building and see how he interacted with staff and students provided me a great opportunity to reflect on how I would do that when I became a principal

The opportunity to simply be the person who was responsible for making final decisions was new to associate principals as they rarely have that opportunity as assistant principals in their permanent assignments; however, the field experience provided them with multiple daily chances to learn new ways to think about problems and strategize solutions from the perspective of the person-in-charge. Katherine summarized this point by noting,

While people can tell you what it is like to be a principal, being able to shadow a principal allowed me to witness his thought process on a daily basis. I was able to understand his thinking as he made daily decisions on how to run a school building.

Data for PQ2

Probing question 2 as it related to RQ1 was as follows: What field experiences do you believe to be the least important and why? Interview responses, as well as review of archival data and interviews of past participants, provided data to answer this question. I found commonality among all participants and the archival data for this question and surprisingly the responses were rather limited. The theme of challenges was evident in this question and the most significant challenges, as well as the least beneficial experiences, were experiences that involved menial administrative and non-instructional tasks.

Beliefs of System Leaders. The consensus in the data revealed that administrative tasks such as running fire drills, bus evacuations, cafeteria duty, or supervising extra-curricular student events as some of the least beneficial because these are tasks that all the associate principals already do as assistant principals in their home schools. Completing these types of tasks does not engage them, immerse them in meaningful learning opportunities, or help them be better prepared for the principalship. Rachel clearly emphasized this point when she noted,

I think some of the non-instructional components of the program are the least important. I think it's important to attend school-based events, but I don't think an aspiring leader would lose out if they didn't attend most of the games, or the art show, or the dance activity during their field experience. I think those things are important, but I don't think they would miss out. I also feel like some of the

logistical pieces during the day that maybe are around non-instructional items such as cafeteria duty are not so important during the field experience.

Additional data provided by Steve noted,

It is easy to provide technical training, but sometimes too much time is allocated during the field experience to this piece where it can be better provided in the classroom setting or at the home school of the associate principal. There should be more engagement, instruction, and focus on the growth of the person during the experience.

Beliefs of past participants and archival participant data. Past participants and the archival data revealed that more was learned during the field experiences in the school than any of the experiences conducted or associated with the classroom learning portion of the program outside of the schoolhouse. Katherine bluntly noted, “I learned more through experiences in the school than in the classroom”, while Jim offered a discrepant and interesting perspective on what he believed to be the least beneficial aspect of the field experience. He noted,

There was very clear communication from the program facilitators that once the two-week shadowing period is up the associate principal is not to communicate with the mentee principal. That is a general mistake and not good for any of the field experience because if the intent is to learn and reflect on choices and actions, the mentee should be able to talk with the mentor during the two weeks of “on their own” experience.

Jim and some archival data provided data to support this belief, which raises the possibility for a potential recommendation later in the study and supports experiential learning as an iterative process between the associate principal and his or her mentor principal. This response lends support that communication throughout the entire field experience is important for the associate principal, particularly when they are leading the school alone. An archival piece of data noted, “maybe a check-in day with the mentor principal in the middle of the two-week individual experience just to see how things are going and review everything would be good?”

Data for PQ3

Beliefs of system leaders, past participants, and archival participant data.

Probing question 3 as it related to RQ1 was as follows: How much time should participants engage in field experiences? Interview responses, as well as review of archival data and interviews of past participants, provided data to answer this question. I found the most commonality among all participants and the archival data for this question with all data revealing that more time should be allotted for the field experience. Currently, the associate principal program allots two-weeks for the field experience where the associate principal leads the school on their own with no support or intercession by the mentor principal. Though the data are unanimous that more time should be allotted for the field experience, there was a wide range of length recommendations along with data on when the field experience should be provided. Below is a table which illustrates the beliefs of the study participants on the length of time for the field experience.

Table 3

Participant Responses to the Recommended Time for Field Experiences

Participant	Recommended length of field experience
Rachel	8 weeks
Helen	8 weeks
Chrissy	7 weeks
Bob	40 weeks
Sue	9 weeks
Kim	12 weeks
Carrie	4 weeks
Steve	40 weeks
Jim	4 weeks
Lisa	40 weeks
Katherine	18 weeks
Victoria	9 weeks
Archival Data	9 weeks

Part of the variance around this range was attributable to past participants sense of guilt for leaving their ‘home’ school for a long period of time. Katherine noted:

After about two weeks, I started feeling guilty about being out of my home school for so long because I knew there was no substitute for me and my colleagues and principal were having to cover all my assigned duties while I was doing my field experience.

As shown in table 4 above, the recommended time for the extended field experiences is varied, but a small handful of participants described beliefs around the time of year when the field experience should occur. Bob noted,

I think that the experience should involve the associate principal in the school from the beginning to the end of the school year, just so they get a full range of what leadership looks like from the beginning, middle, and end of the school year.

However, Sue noted,

My first choice would be to the beginning of the school year because the biggest challenges are at the beginning of the school year, which creates positive momentum for the associate principal and the school they are serving in for their field experience.

Data for PQ4

Probing question 4 as it related to RQ1 was as follows: How would you describe your beliefs on the importance of mentoring as part of the field experience? Interview responses, as well as review of archival data and interviews of past participants, provided data to answer this question. The theme which emerged from this question was strong relationships. Study participants and the archival data supported the importance of mentoring as the foundation for building and sustaining strong relationships between the associate principal and the mentor principal. The past participants of the field experience each described that they still stay in constant communication with their mentor principal several years after completing the field experience.

Beliefs of system leaders. Study participants in this category described strong feelings around the importance and positive influence of mentoring as part of the field experience. Chrissy noted,

that the field experience and mentoring aspect of it provides a level of vulnerability on both the mentor and mentee which fosters a sense of openness that creates such a strong foundation of support that carries forward for many years after the field experience is over.

System leaders also noted the importance of mentoring during the field experience as an opportunity for the associate principal to develop a relationship with a non-evaluative administrator who can listen with no judgment and ask questions to support the growth of the associate principal. Bob noted,

The mentor principal serves as a thought partner during the field experience, which allows the associate principal the opportunity to process the myriad of information that they are bombarded with daily. I have seen this relationship of non-evaluative feedback carry on between the associate principal and mentor principal for years after the field experience and even when the associate principal becomes a principal.

Kim described positive beliefs around the mentoring aspect of the field experience when she noted,

On-going feedback and mentoring for assistant principals in their home school is not as feasible as in the structured field experience opportunity. The level of commitment to mentoring is higher in the field experience component. Past participants consistently have shared with me that the mentoring aspect of the program was the most beneficial and long-lasting aspect of the field experience.

Beliefs of past participants and archival participant data. Each of the current principals who were past participants in the field experience described beliefs that supported the system leader beliefs around the positive influence of the mentoring aspect of the field experience. Their descriptions were, in many cases, were provided in stronger, more enthusiastic tones than the system leaders. Jim noted,

I am a huge proponent that we must support each other and find the matches that allow those strong relationships to happen. I have spoken with principals who wished they had the Associate Principal program to help them early in their principalship. The mentoring helped with working through issues in a trusting, non-evaluative relationship. I would just say, trust and put yourself out there. Mentorship is key and highly effective.

Other principals also described how their mentor-mentee relationship continued well past the field experience as noted by Lisa,

The mentoring was an excellent component of the field experience. My mentee and I was able to talk about how the district operates and look at the job of the principal through the lens of the principal. Two years later, my mentee still reaches out to me at least one to two months, via email or in-person, just for advice or for a listening ear.

Principals even described that their relationship with their mentor principals grew so strong that they found themselves seeking their input on professional matters not directly related to the job of principal as Katherine noted,

The mentor component of the field experience was an invaluable opportunity for me. To this day, I have my mentor on speed dial for anything I need to talk about with him. Since he is not attached to my evaluation, I can talk with him about anything and have even talked with him about positions I was interested in applying for with the district.

Archival data also supported the strong relationship and importance of mentoring as part of the field experience for associate principals in the program. Data from the past four years of the program show the importance participants placed on not only developing mentoring relationships with their field experience principal but also with the executive level staff. No current principal who was interviewed for this study described mentoring with anyone other than their mentor principal; however, archival data revealed an additional layer of mentoring when some participants noted,

I enjoyed the opportunity to work closely with the executive director of the school regarding growth opportunities for the students and staff. I enjoyed the times when my executive director and area superintendent visited me during my field experience because I was able to hear a different perspective and one that came from working with other schools in the district. I think this was a very beneficial addition to the mentoring aspect of the field experience.

These specific statements supported the agreement about the influence of mentoring on the field experience.

Data for RQ2

RQ2: How do the current beliefs of principals who have participated in the

principal preparation program compare to their beliefs at the time of completion of the program as described in archival data?

Interview responses from system leaders, past participants, and archival data provided information to answer this question. This specific question was modified slightly for system leaders to gather their beliefs on current principals who participated in the field experience to compare responses to current principals who participated in the field experience and the archival data. The theme of empowerment and growth developed from a review of the data. System leaders described a higher level of confidence among principals who participated in the field experience while current principals and the archival data revealed a greater and growing level of comfort in making day-to-day decisions in the schoolhouse because of participating in the field experience as compared to archival data of associate principals who just finish the program as well as their own beliefs when they completed the program.

Beliefs of system leaders. Responses from system leaders were varied and described a range of beliefs on the influence of the field experience on principals who participated compared with those that did not participate. Steve described the importance of the field experience in helping the associate principal develop their purpose prior to taking on the role of principal compared to the principal who did not have a field experience prior to them becoming principals. He noted,

I notice that current principals who went through the field experience have built a cadre of people to rely on when they became principals – people they can turn to for anything. The field experience allowed them to build confidence and build

their story to make them viable candidates in the interviewing and hiring process.

The field experience helped them develop their moral, ethical, and instructional center.

Other participants echoed these beliefs and added that principals who have gone through the field experience appear to have a greater willingness to be open to new ideas and confidence about making decisions and following a path that they feel is in the best interest of their students. Chrissy noted,

Principals who did the field experience tend to have a growth mindset around leadership and they feel empowered to learn without risk. They have an attitude of ‘falling forward’ that is not as evident as those principals I know who did not have any type of field experience.

Other system leaders described a more quantifiable approach to the benefits of principals who participated in the field experience. Sue noted,

All the principals I have worked with who went through the field experience have been very successful in their first and second year as principals. They have improved their graduation, attendance, and post-secondary matriculation rates for students more so than their peers with the same amount of experience that did not participate in the field experience. I believe a large part of this is because they have built such a strong network of support and know whom to call on if they or their school needs help with anything. They realize they are not alone in this work and these people are lifelong resources for them. They have surpassed my expectations of how well they would do in their first few years as principal.

A slightly discrepant belief was expressed by Carrie when she described the difference she has observed between principals who did and did not participate in the field experience. She noted,

There seems to be a quality control issue where not all current principals had the same level or type of field experience when they were in the program. Those principals who may not have had a high-quality field experience do not display the same level of confidence or decision-making skills. In addition, since the field experience is not a requirement of becoming a principal in our district, more systemwide training for all new principals may be needed to level set expectations and goals for new principals. This is where specific goals or a template could be implemented to help new principals develop a compelling ‘why’ for their desire to be a principal in our district.

Beliefs of past participants and the archival data. The current principals in this study described how the field experience helped them feel more confident and empowered when entering their first year as principals. However, they described different aspects of the field experience which had more influence on them and how those components strengthened since completing the program. Jim noted,

The field experience helped me learn that I didn’t need to know everything because I had built a strong support network through my field experience. I noticed that some of my colleagues who did not have that field experience were more stressed because they did not have someone(s) to rely on when they had questions. I had learned whom to call for support depending on what I needed.

The field experience allowed me to get my feet wet, find resources and communicate a vision to my staff as a first-year principal. The experience helped me build confidence in taking on the role of principal and helped me answer the question – ‘Am I ready?’ and ‘Will I do an effective job?’

Katherine described a more community-oriented belief on how she felt better prepared to take on the job of principal. Also, as she reflected on her beliefs immediately following the field experience to this point in her principal career, she realized how important it was to build connections and establish a strong sense of community as a school leader. She noted,

I realize that I take more time to reflect on decisions now than I may have when I immediately completed the field experience. I think that is because I was taught by my mentor principal to take this valuable time when making decisions that influence students and the greater school community. I also learned through my field experience how to connect with my community in ways that I may not have fully realized three years ago just coming out of the program.

A review of the archival data revealed that associate principals who provided their feedback at the end of their experience noted that they were more confident in the areas of relationship building, long-range planning, instructional leadership, and making more higher-level decisions required of the principal. However, as noted earlier by current principals who participated in the study, their level of confidence or empowerment grew significantly when they became principals and took on the day-to-day responsibility of the position. A comment from the archival data revealed,

Overall, the program has served as a starting point for my future role as a principal. I have worked with my mentor principal in developing personal and professional goals that I hope will help me grow as I prepare to be a principal.

While collecting data using interviews and review of archival data from past participants who had field experiences the Associate Principal program, I was able to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The attention to these trustworthiness components allowed me to create a sense of trust and confidentiality between me and the participants. As the data were collected, participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and could be ended by them at any time without consequence. In addition, all data collected would be secured and maintained with the highest level of confidentiality as per IRB standards.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The establishment of credibility relied on sound methodology within the overall study with specific detail to data collection (Shenton, 2004). To gather beliefs on the usefulness of the field experience component within a principal preparation program, I interviewed central office administrators who have direct responsibility for principal preparation within the study district as well as current principals who participated in the principal preparation program within the past two years. An inductive data analysis process was used to generate categories from codes and themes from categories (Barret, Choi, & Li, 2011).

Transferability was achieved through a rich description of the data collected through interviews and data analysis (Shenton, 2004). In addition, the selection of 12

participants from a variety of offices within the study district provided a broad spectrum of beliefs on the research questions (Shenton, 2004). Participants were selected from five different offices within the study district to gain a wide perspective on beliefs around the usefulness of field experiences in principal preparation. The participant and office variance, coupled with a deliberate inductive approach to data analysis, will allow transferability for future studies on this topic.

Dependability is a multistep process to ensure data were collected and analyzed appropriately. Triangulation of the data was completed by comparing data collected from interviews and archival end-of-course participant survey data collected from 2016-2019. Each participant who was interviewed was also provided the opportunity to review the transcript of their interviews to ensure accurate collection of their interview data. Each participant provided their feedback on their respective transcript review within one week of receiving their transcripts and each agreed with their interview transcripts and responses. During the early phases of data analysis, member checks were performed where each interviewee was provided the opportunity to review my initial interpretations of their data and clarify any potential misunderstandings. No interviewee found any conflicts between information provided to me in their interviews and initial interpretations. Saturation was reached in the research on the topic with the inclusion of seminal works and research released as currently as 2019.

Confirmability was established through consistent reflexive practice, memo writing, and recognition of my personal bias', beliefs, and assumptions related to the topic of field experiences within principal preparation programs (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Prior to each interview, I reflected on my notes and memos from previous interviews to ensure consistency in questions asked and my initial coding of responses from participants and analysis of the archival data. This process assisted me in identifying any potential personal biases and check my beliefs and assumptions prior to each interview. Peer debriefing was also used with an uninvolved third party to further establish confirmability of interpretations, data codes, and implications of the data were accurate (Guba, 1981). The peer de-briefer did not note any conflicts or highlight any areas where personal bias may have influenced my interpretations or codes; hence, providing a certain level of objectivity to the findings described in the results.

Summary

This study explored the beliefs of system leaders and past participants on the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program. The research questions explored the beliefs of the participants specifically on the usefulness of the field experience component of the associate principal program and how the beliefs current principals who participated in the program as compared to archival data. This study found that the field experience component of the associate principal program was useful, but with varying reasons as to why and with a wide range of recommendations from participants as to the length of the experience as well as some challenges expressed with types of experiences and consistency. Participants expressed, and the archival data supported, strong beliefs around the mentoring component of the program and its long-lasting effects. Current principals who participated in the program and field experience have grown more in their knowledge and skill set and have felt more empowered, as

compared to when they completed the program. The opportunities provided during the field experience component of the program provided the foundation for this growth and empowerment.

In Chapter 5 I will describe the interpretation of these data as well as the implications of these results. Limitations of the study and recommendations will also be described based on the data collected. Finally, the social influence and positive social change, as a result of this study, will be described in the next section.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to explore the beliefs of system leaders and past participants regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of an associate principal preparation program, along with the examination of archival data in order to analyze past participant beliefs regarding their current practices as principals to provide recommendations for the program. The lack of knowledge regarding the usefulness of the field experience component of the associate principal preparation program served as the key problem for this study. A key finding was the identification of the experiential nature of the experience by system leaders and past participants as being a very useful component of the field experience. Being able to apply knowledge learned during the classroom component of the principal preparation program was cited as most useful for the experience. Other key findings were opportunities for reflective leadership to not only learn from mistakes but analyze and synthesize the daily experiences of the internship to better the associate principals' skillsets. This was often done through another key finding which was the critical nature of mentoring during and after the field experience, which was highly valued by all the study's participants as one of the long-lasting influencers on the success of novice principals. Lastly, the one challenging finding identified through the data analysis was the lack of a longer time period to engage in the field experience. Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications of the findings, and conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

I drew conclusions through notetaking, coding, categorizing, theme identification, and writing based on the data. Findings in this study added to knowledge regarding field experiences within principal preparation programs. I analyzed the data using the conceptual framework of constructivism associated with active learning (Bruner, 1966; Dewey, 1916; Merriam, 2008; Piaget, 1977).

Key finding 1. The experiential nature of the field experience was believed to be the most useful component of the associate principal preparation program according to all participants and archival data. It was evident that participants felt the hands-on, participatory nature of the field experience was very useful. Each interview participant described their positive beliefs regarding the various opportunities associate principals had to apply their learning to a new school setting and how the experience would prepare them for the role of principal. Though no two field experiences are exactly alike, each current principal who was interviewed was able to describe specific experiences during their respective field experiences that allowed them to truly experience the role of principal, which they pointed to as a major contribution of their success as first, second, or third year principals.

The experience of spending time in the schoolhouse working side-by-side with a veteran principal and ultimately running the school by yourself for an extended period was one of the most significant and useful components of any principal preparation program and field experience (Bush, 2016). Furthermore, the engagement of associate principals in experiences such as leading professional development, data discussions, and

teacher observations builds the instructional leadership capacity of all those who participate (Larsen, 2016). Dodson, (2015a) found that 74% of current principals had some type of field experience where participants could experience multiple aspects of the principalship either alongside a mentor principal or alone.

Piaget (1977) said that learning is a process instead of an isolated event. It is important for learners to engage in the practice of gaining, applying, reflecting, adjusting, and re-applying new knowledge to better cement it into their schema. Piaget (1977) said that it was critical for learners to engage in this process or cycle in an environment where experiences are rich and meaningful as possible. Piaget's work built upon Dewey's (1916) theories that learners construct meaning from their learning through concept, reflection, and action, which supports the data that experiential learning was an important component of the field experience for associate principals.

Key finding 2. Reflective leadership was believed to be the most beneficial result for associate principals as described by participants. As associate principals participated in various field experiences, they noted that they valued the time they had to contemplate their decisions and adjust their practice as their field experience progressed. Kim said that the unplanned experiences encountered during the field experience were the ones that provided the best opportunity to reflect on their current leadership in preparation for a future principal position.

Davis and Darling-Hammond (2012) found that it was critical for aspiring principals to have opportunities to put into practice the learning and theory they acquired in the regular classroom setting. Application of these learned skills would benefit

students, teachers, and the mentee principals. A body of research exists to support the importance of reflective leadership as a means to provide associate principals an opportunity to adapt their classroom learning while engaged in field experiences (Backor & Gordon, 2015; Bush, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Larsen, 2016; Petty, 2016; The Wallace Foundation, 2017; Yongmei, Rorrer, Pounder, Young, & Korach, 2019).

These reflective opportunities to practice what is learned in the classroom are what Dewey (1916) described as reflective activities where the learner is placed in a setting where they perceive relationships and connections between the parts of the experience to derive meaning and engage in a learning loop. Constructing and then deriving meaning within one's environment while engaged in reflective practice is the essence of constructivist theory. Piaget (1970) said that adults construct meaning within their environment through reflection and action, which was found to be a major theme discerned from the data of this study. System leaders, past participants, and the archival data revealed a high value on the opportunities to reflect and learn from the various field experiences.

Key finding 3. Challenges in terms of length of time of the field experience were identified, but participants provided their beliefs for recommended field experience times ranging from 4 to 40 weeks. Most system leaders agreed that a longer field experience would be ideal; however, systemic budget constraints and finding adequate coverage for associate principals while they were on assignment was not feasible or sustainable. Additionally, past participants and archival data revealed that though associate principals

would enjoy a long field experience, they felt guilty for leaving their home school without adequate coverage for an extended period.

This wide range of participant beliefs is in line with the lack of consensus regarding field experience length in the literature (Anderson, 2017; Pannell, et al., 2015). Participants in this study said that field experiences should be lengthened as much as possible (Backor & Gordon, 2015). The literature also encompassed a wide range of field experience lengths from one week in Illinois (Cosner et al, 2015) to two years in Ohio (Larsen, 2016). The rationale used by many national universities and school districts for an extended field experience was that it assists as much as possible with the building of leadership capacity and skill sets of future principals (Kearney & Valadez, 2015).

Dewey (1916) said did describe that the continuity of experiences that one has plays a critical role in the learners understanding of experiences. Furthermore, Bruner (1966) said that learners construct meaning by building on prior experiences and ultimately, all learning is derived from cumulative experiences. It stands to reason that more experiences an associate principal has over a longer period would lead to a greater level of learning.

Key finding 4. All participants stated that mentoring provided the foundation for the strong relationships needed for associate principals to be successful during the field experience and as new principals. The benefits of the mentoring relationships created through the field experiences lasted well beyond the field experiences as noted by the system leaders and past participants. Each interviewee shared that the mentoring aspect of the field experience provided mentor and mentee alike opportunities for professional

growth. System leaders recognized the importance of the mentoring relationship in how it establishes a non-evaluative person for the mentee to share and discuss any topics without concern for judgment by an evaluator. Current principals who were past participants in the field experiences focused on the continued importance their mentor principal has on assisting them with difficult decisions they need to make as novice principals.

Jim described how the mentoring relationship established with his mentor helped him develop his “why” for becoming a principal. This philosophical professional awareness is described in the literature as helping mentees find their “north star” and assisting them in creating their professional personality, traits, preferences, and leadership style (Schechter, 2014). The literature also supported the notion of carefully matching the mentor with the mentee in preparation for the field experience (Taylor et al., 2014). Helen, Chrissy, and Jim each noted the importance of ensuring that system leaders and program designers take great care in matching associate principals with mentor principals for the field experience. Further research conducted at the University of Missouri indicated that mentees who were appropriately matched with mentor principals were able to find first-year principal assignments faster than mentees who were not appropriately matched or did not have a mentor principal at all (Thomas et al., 2018).

As part of the conceptual framework for this study, mentoring as part of field experiences was noted as a vital component for aspiring principals in principal preparation programs across the world (Schechter & Firuz, 2015; Weiner & Burton, 2016). Both Bruner (1966) and Merriam (2008) identified in their research the importance and

essential nature of the mentoring relationship during the learning process. Constructivist theory supports the acquisition, application, and reflection of new learning in any environment and when coupled with a mentorship experience, the mentee is able to fully engage in the learning cycle to support their attainment of new knowledge.

Key finding 5. Current principals who participated in the associate principal field experience described significant growth and empowerment as decision makers and instructional leaders as new principals as compared to end-of-course archival data completed shortly after program completion. These principals noted a belief and feeling of significant growth and empowerment as a direct result of the opportunities they had as associate principals prior to becoming principals. Their comfort level as novice principals in making not only the day-to-day routine decisions but knowing who to reach out to for input and support prior to making more significant decisions was noted by them in this study when their interview data were compared to archival data of participants who just recently completed the program. Though the archival data did indicate a belief that participants grew from engaging in field experiences, past participants interviewed for this study made a specific note to how much greater their beliefs are now on that growth than when they completed the field experience and program.

The literature on field experiences and principal preparation programs in general, focused on the types of field experiences, number of hours, mentorship, and the integration of social justice experiences for aspiring principal while engaged in field experiences. The peer-reviewed literature around the growth and empowerment of aspiring principals from program completion to novice principal was not a theme

identified in this study's extensive review of the literature. Therefore, this theme could serve as an extension of knowledge on this topic and an area where further research could be beneficial.

Constructivist theory, nor the literature included in the conceptual framework for this study, specifically address the growth or empowerment of novice principals as a result of their field experiences; however, the research was clear that aspiring principals should spend as much time as possible immersed in their field experiences within a school to allow deep interactions with principals, students, staff, parents, and external stakeholders to develop a strong sense of the principalship and prepare them for the challenges of the position (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Figueiredo-Brown, Camp-Ringler & James, 2015; Kearney & Valadez, 2015). This level of deep immersion during the field experience could account for the beliefs expressed by current principals on how much more professional growth and empowerment they feel now as compared to the archival data which were collected at the end of the field experience and principal preparation program.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study included sample size and researcher bias due to existing relationships with some of the participants. To mitigate the small sample size of 12 participants, purposeful sampling was conducted to ensure variance among the participants to assist in gathering complete answers to the research questions (Schoch, 2016; Patton, 2002). Also, due to the case study design, smaller sample populations allowed me to delve deeply into each research question with the participants to assist in

reaching saturation in responses (Creswell, 2018; Dawidowicz, 2011; Yin, 2018; Zainal, 2007). In addition, the small sample size and purposeful sampling of such a specific group of participants, i.e. executive level staff and current principals, may limit the generalization of the study's findings, but not compromise the trustworthiness of the study because I believe that I reached saturation in responses I was receiving from interviewees as I began noting very similar responses from the participants as I interviewed the last set of participants.

I consistently monitored research bias throughout the research process, but it may have still been a limiting factor. To mitigate researcher bias due to pre-existing professional relationships with some of the participants, I disclosed my professional relationship with some of the participants early in this study (Creswell, 2014) and made sure none of the participants were under my supervision. Interviews were also conducted in a consistent manner using the same primary and probing questions for all participants. All interviews were held in a private meeting room to ensure confidentiality of the participants and all interviews were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed prior to any formal data analysis.

Recommendations

Given the importance of principal preparation programs and the usefulness of the related field experiences associated with such programs, further research on the usefulness and outcomes related to field experiences is warranted. As a result of the information gleaned from this study, the following recommendations may have the potential to add to the body of research on this topic and have practical implications for

universities and school districts who implement field experiences within principal preparation programs. First, the expansion of participants, to include more current principals who participated in field experiences as part of their principal preparation program, for a similar study could benefit the body of research by providing more generalizable results. Though the small number of participants for this study is supported by the literature, a deeper collection of data from participants other than system leaders could increase the body of research and practical applications from findings (Creswell, 2018; Dawidowicz, 2011; Yin, 2018; Zainal, 2007)

Also, beliefs around the length of time field experiences should be designed for are wide and varied. Participants in this study provided an almost 40-week gap in recommended time for field experiences, where the literature offered an even wider margin of almost two-years (Cosner et al, 2015; Larsen, 2016). An expansion of the four-week field experience for the study's district may provide a deeper, richer preparation for the participants if supporting program resources could be provided in terms of administrative coverage at 'home' schools for associate principals who are participating in the field experience.

Additionally, all participants noted the importance of the mentor experience for the associate principal during the field experience and for years following completion of the field experience and principal preparation program. This confirms previous research that mentoring as part of field experiences provided opportunities for participants to build their leadership capacity, instructional skills, and vision in real-world settings (Carara, Swanson, Van Kuren & Zamudio, 2018). Research on field experience placement

procedures for associate principals could provide an opportunity for a more refined and consistent process for assignment of mentor principals to associate principals.

Lastly, several participants noted several constraints to extending the length of the field experience due to budgetary and coverage logistics. A system policy approved by the local board of education and supported by a superintendent's rule could provide the needed guidance and accountability to provide the additional financial and human capital support noted by the participants and outlined in this study's earlier findings. This would assist in mitigating the data collected from current principals' beliefs over the influence of their absence on their 'home' school and allow them to more fully focus on their field experience. The research was clear that the longer an aspiring leader can stay immersed in the field experience in the schoolhouse, the better trained and prepared he or she will be for the role of principal (Thomas et al., 2018).

Implications

Principal preparation and the related field experience are critical components to the initial success of principals in today's demanding role of leading 21st century schools (Lipke & Manaseri, 2019). Because of the influential nature of the principal in any schoolhouse, it is important that aspiring principals be exposed to field experiences which prepare them for the many roles they will need to assume when becoming principals (Anderson, 2017; Bush, 2016; Kearney & Valadez, 2015; Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015; Orphanos & Orr, 2014; The Wallace Foundation, 2016; Young & Eddy-Spicer, 2019). The findings in this study support the need for greater exploration into designing a longer field experience for aspiring principals to allow for a deeper

immersion into the myriad of experiences required for novice principals. Additionally, due to the importance of mentoring during the field experience, a greater focus on the criteria used to match aspiring principals with mentor principals would benefit principal preparation programs.

Positive Social Change at the Organizational Level

The data resulting from this study indicated that past participants of the principal preparation program placed a high value on the positive relationships developed through the mentoring component of the field experience. The potential organizational change which could be supported by this study is the need for concise, clear, and consistent standards for assigning associate principals with mentor principals in the field experience. Additionally, there could be positive social change at the organizational level if aspiring principals' beliefs and perceptions are explored prior to their placement with a mentor principal. No participants in this study indicated that they were asked what type of leader they would like to work with to help in areas where they, as aspiring leaders, need growth. These pre-assignment conversations could result in even more positive social change at the organizational level with novice principals who are more well-rounded in their skill set and ability to lead any type of school.

Positive Social Change at the Policy Level

The study results indicated that additional time for associate principals to remain in their field experience would benefit them in building the important relationships with their mentor principal, field experience staff, community, and, most importantly, students. By creating system policy which would provide the necessary financial and

human capital support to extend field experience times for associate principals, they would be free from concern and able to focus all their efforts on not only honing their leadership skills but working with students to support their academic and social growth. The literature is relatively scant, only within the past five years, on the importance of proper placement of aspiring principals in field experiences which will expose them to more diverse and rapidly changing social, racial, and economic demographics (Figueiredo-Brown et al., 2015; Gordon & Ronder, 2016; Miller & Martin, 2014; O'Malley & Capper, 2015).

Methodological Implications

Due to the small sample size and qualitative case study design of this study, it is worth conducting a similar study using a quantitative approach. To provide more details from varied perspectives and to compare results in a more concise fashion, a quantitative study could be created to survey a broader range of past participants who are and are not currently principals to compare their perceptions on the usefulness of the field experience now versus when they completed the program. A quantitative comparison between these perceptions would be beneficial in helping explore the specific components of the field experience which had the longest lasting effects on past participants and provide more data on if the field experience assisted current principals with getting their first job as principal.

Theoretical Implications

Constructivist theory confirms the importance of well-designed and implemented field experiences for aspiring principals. The beliefs of the study's participants were clear

on the benefits of the field experience on providing hands-on, immersive experiences that provided associate principals with the opportunity to engage in a learning cycle of application, reflection, and adaptation of new knowledge. Current principals who were past participants in the field experience and archival data of other past participants indicated the strong belief that the opportunity to be mentored by an experienced principal within the school environment and then have the opportunity to lead that school for a short time period was the most beneficial aspect of the year-long preparation program. Information learned in the monthly classroom meeting structure was able to be applied to real-world scenarios with the ability to discuss and reflect with the mentor principal. Though challenges were expressed with some areas of the overall field experience, the findings support the constructivist theory where associate principals were able to construct and derive meaning from their field experience while engaged in relationship building and reflective practice as outlined by Dewey (1916).

Recommendations for Practice

This study provided data on the usefulness of the field experience component of a principal preparation program within one large suburban-urban school district. In a large district, there are many opportunities for aspiring principals to engage in meaningful, immersive, and rich field experiences in many different types of schoolhouses. Only within an actual school can aspiring leaders have the opportunity to practice what they have learned in the classroom of the preparation program and build the skills necessary to be able to make the many important decisions they will need to make when they become principals. As one of the study's participants noted in her interview, it is important for the

associate principal and mentor principal to each be open and vulnerable to the entire field experience. Both should be open to learning and to the unexpected opportunities that the field experience provides. Therefore, it is critical that the relationship between the associate principal and mentor principal be given the opportunity to grow and develop over time.

A recommendation for practice related to key findings one, two, and four is to conduct a survey of associate principals prior to assignment of a mentor principals to ensure the best possible match with respect to personality, leadership style, goals of the associate principal, types of experiences he or she wishes to have during the field experience, and type of school he or she wishes to have their field experience conducted in for the four weeks. This recommendation stems from past participants interviewed for this study indicating that they were simply assigned a mentor principal and school with little input on where they would like to have their field experience or the reasons why. By allowing associate principals to have more formal input in their field experience, their reflections and learning from the field experiences have the potential to be deeper and more meaningful. This could lead to a greater sense of growth and empowerment as they complete the field experience and begin in their new roles as principals. In addition, the creation of a detailed rubric for associate principals to use while participating in the field experience would assist them in monitoring their own progress. Study participants noted the potential value in such a rubric and offered how such a document would assist them in reflective practice and conversations with their mentor principals

A recommendation related to key finding three and earlier recommendation for further research would be to find opportunities to extend the length of the field experience for associate principals. As a matter of practice, participants of this study provided potential solutions by spreading the field experience over a longer period of time during the school year instead of concentrating it in one four-week period during the middle of the school year. If policy changes are not able to address the extension of the field experience by providing the fiscal and human capital resources, a related recommendation could be to extend the field experience over two years to provide opportunities for associate principals to participate in experiences in the beginning and end of the school year not currently afforded by having their field experience in the middle of the school year. Several system leaders and current principals indicated that this widening of field experience opportunities would add to the usefulness of the field experience within the principal preparation program.

Conclusion

This study provided data related to the usefulness of field experiences as part of principal preparation programs. Bush (2016) was clear in his research that principals carry the most influence in the schoolhouse and their adequate preparation to lead through the challenges and pressures of today's schools is of paramount importance. The beliefs of system leaders and past participants who have a stake in the outcomes of field experiences are important to the continual evolution of high-quality field experiences within university or district level principal preparation programs. Constructivist theory strongly supports the notion of embedded learning experiences which allow the

participant to engage in learning cycles to not only improve their knowledge but also their practice. Being able to craft a budget, build a master schedule, and attend meetings are some of the managerial tasks associated with field experiences; however, it is the more nuanced experiences of building relationships, knowing how to make important decisions, and instructional leadership that constitute the essence of the principalship according to participants of this study. Therefore, providing meaningful and varied experiences which allow a deep reflective opportunity for the associate principal in a timeframe that fosters continual learning will lead to principals who are empowered to be the best principals possible for their communities. It is these types of data revealed in this study which may be used to further refine and enhance the usefulness of field experiences within principal preparation programs.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Date:
 Time:
 Interviewee Code #:
 Location of Interview:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions and Notes
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hi, my name is George Roberts. Thank you very much for participating in this interview today. As you know, the purpose of this interview is to gather beliefs on the usefulness of field experiences within principal preparation programs. This should last about 30-45 minutes. After the interview, I will be examining your answers for data analysis purposes. However, I will not identify you in my documents, and no one will be able to identify you with your answers. You can choose to stop this interview at any time. Also, I need to let you know that this interview will be recorded for transcription purposes. • Do you have any questions? • Are you ready to begin?
Question 1	<p>How would you describe the usefulness of the field experience component of the principal preparation program in the district?</p> <p>Probing Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What field experiences do you perceive as most important and why? 2. What field experiences do you perceive as least important and why? 3. How much time should participants engage in field experiences? 4. How would you describe the importance of mentoring as part of field experiences?

Question 2	What are your beliefs of current principals who participated in field experiences when they were part of the district's principal preparation program?
Question 3	As a current principal who participated in field experiences within the district's principal preparation program, how would you describe your beliefs on the usefulness of the field experience now as a principal compared to when you completed the field experience? <i>*This question is only for current principals</i>
Close	Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you'd like to share? Do you have any questions for me? Thank you for your time, goodbye.

Appendix B: End of Program Survey

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Associate Principal program met its primary goal of providing me with varied school-based leadership development experiences.				
The Associate Principal program provided me with a professional growth opportunity that advanced my leadership practices.				
The design of the Associate Principal program was beneficial.				
Overall, you received effective coaching from your Lead Principal in helping you identify and meet goals during in your internship?				
Overall, there was effective and reflective dialogue on readings between you and your Lead Principal?				
You were satisfied with the expectations established for serving independently prior to your internship?				
You were satisfied with the resources provided during the sessions in relation to your leadership internship role?				
You were satisfied with your effectiveness for the benchmark experience of leading a data dialogue meeting with a specific grade/department				
You were satisfied with your level of effectiveness for the benchmark experience of developing and delivering professional learning.				

You were satisfied with your level of effectiveness for the benchmark experience of crafting and disseminating school wide communication.				
You were satisfied with your effectiveness for the benchmark experience of conducting informal observations and providing feedback.				
You were satisfied with the overall effectiveness of the Associate Principal program.				
Total Scores				
Open ended questions				
What recommendations would you make to enhance or improve your experience as an Associate Principal Intern?				
What recommendations would you make to enhance or improve the experience of the Associate Principal program?				
Please comment on continuing, modifying, or discontinuing the Associate Principal program.				